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Vital Congregations Faithful Disciples

VISION FOR THE CHURCH



The United Methodist
Council of Bishops

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Leader's Guide



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VITAL CONGREGATIONS— FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

VISION FOR THE CHURCH

LEADER'S GUIDE

*Exp in Pract Kit
Power & Light*

By John and Adrienne Carr

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

VITAL CONGREGATIONS—FAITHFUL DISCIPLES
Leader's Guide
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A MESSAGE FROM THE WRITERS

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

The bishops' *Foundation Document* is exciting reading, full of perception and profundity. But what makes it most exciting is the way in which it invites us in the local church into "a time of searching" and the way in which it expects God and us to come out of that searching with a new vision for the church in our day! We certainly have felt invited into the process. Developing this *Leader's Guide* has called forth and utilized just about every bit of experience and expertise we've gained over the course of thirty years of ministry. And we are as excited about the material and its potential for usefulness as anything we have ever done.

The goal is not just *information* but *transformation*. We hope that the program will prompt people to read the *Foundation Document* itself; we have tried to help that happen. But our primary effort has been to help people engage in an experiential way what the bishops are talking about. In the spirit of the *Foundation Document* and of our whole United Methodist heritage, these sessions invite every person in your group to contribute her or his gifts to the process.

You may be comforted to know that every bit of this material has been tried out in a variety of settings and situations under both lay and clergy leadership. It seems to work everywhere. And though we have assumed that the average group using it will have eight to twelve people, we have suggested adaptations for both smaller and much larger gatherings. Two of our test groups had three to four participants. Perhaps a testimony from one of our testers, a student pastor, will encourage you.

"If I'd seen this stuff first, I'd never have offered to try it in my little rural church. And if I hadn't promised to test it exactly as it was, I certainly would have left out a bunch of things I was sure that my people would never be willing or able to do. But having promised, I did it. To my astonishment it worked incredibly well."

So we invite you into the process. The Lord be with you.

John and Adrienne Carr
Candler School of Theology

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We know from our own experience that when faced with the pressure of preparing, there is a great temptation to zip past the preliminaries and turn immediately to the session plans. We hope you won't. For compressed in the following pages are a variety of practical tips that could make all the difference in the experience you and your group have.

Ways This Program Can Be Used

We have designed for maximum flexibility and usefulness. There are nine sessions, but you can use seven of them (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9) and still cover the main ideas. Moreover, we think you will find that various individual sessions or smaller combinations of them can be used effectively. Sessions 1, 4, 5, and 9 could be used as one-time offerings.

These plans can be used in formats from forty-five minutes to two hours. We have placed a "+" beside those parts that easily could use more time. Everyone who has tried the program tells us that *forty-five minutes is the absolute minimum amount of time needed*. Generally speaking, groups of less than eight or larger than twenty will need more time because very small groups will be doing more things as a total group while larger groups will be having more subgroups reporting back.

Here is a beginning list of possible uses:

Already Existing Settings

1. Church school class. Though there are only nine sessions, Sessions 1, 2, 7, and 8 each could be done over two weeks, thereby filling a church school quarter.
2. Church supper and program.
3. First forty-five minutes of a council, committee, work area, or board meeting.
4. Sunday night service.
5. Wednesday night prayer meeting.
6. Existing study or prayer group.
7. United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, United Methodist Youth Fellowship.

Specially Created Settings

1. A weekly study group brought together for this study. In an hour a week, a group could cover the material well. But we would recommend one and one-half hour sessions, which include thirty to forty-five minutes of sharing.

Such a study would provide an excellent opportunity to reach out to some inactive members of your church, saying to them, "Since what has been happening or not happening has made the church less meaningful to you, won't you please come and help us envision how we are called to be different?"

2. A retreat. This could be done in a Friday night (Session 1) and Saturday (Sessions 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8) format. The final session (9) might be done on Sunday morning before worship (which might be Communion) with the letters presented as a part of the offering.
3. A congregation-wide study for a month. You could use existing groups or mix the congregation in reconfigured groups at various times during the week. One possible format for the latter option would be a five-week program (perhaps during Lent). The first and last sessions might be planned for everyone together. That would leave four two-hour sessions (2 and 3, 4 and 5, 6 and 7, and one session devoted to 8). Do the program first with the leaders; they will become your best recruiters!

How to Get Commitment

At the very least, try to get your group to covenant to come regularly and on time for whatever number of sessions you choose to do. If your congregation or group is not used to this kind of commitment, here are some suggestions for evoking it:

1. Use the first session in a larger context such as a church supper or Sunday evening service to give people an intriguing taste of what it is like. Then invite people to commit for six or however many sessions you plan on using, explaining that the program depends on everyone's regular participation. We always say something like this: **"The flu or an emergency can hit anyone, but if you know that you will miss more than one session (out of six, or two out of nine), it may be better not to sign up. If you do have to miss a session, someone in the group will catch you up so you won't feel left out."**
2. In an existing group such as a Sunday school class with a less than perfect attendance record, again acknowledge that some may have to miss a session. But emphasize that the group will count on those people doing the reading and that someone will be assigned to spend at least fifteen minutes helping them catch up.
3. Ask people to notify you in advance if they know they will have to miss a session. Explain that this will
 - a) prevent the rest of the group from worrying about them,
 - b) help in the planning of groupings in the session,
 - c) insure that we can arrange for someone to help them catch up on what went on.

Then, if someone does not come and you have not heard from him or her by ten or fifteen minutes into the session, ask someone to try to reach the absent person by phone. You will find that this communicates a new kind of caring to a group. In twenty-five years of doing this ourselves and encouraging skeptical leaders to do it also, we never have had anything but the most positive responses.

We think it pays to be honest about the fact that irregular attendance harms far more than the absentees themselves; it severely detracts from the total group experience. What do you have to lose? What you have to gain might be your congregation discovering the qualitative difference such faithfulness can make.

How to Encourage Participation

This *Leader's Guide* assumes that each participant in your group is a unique and valuable child of God who has real contributions to make and will participate fully. In over thirty years of ministry in congregations ranging from one member to 4200 and in larger events of up to 400 people who did not know one another, we never have had a group in which every person did not participate to some extent.

We recognize, however, that many of our church groups are not used to this. So we have planned very carefully to start on a positive and nonthreatening note and gradually deepen what we ask people to do. For example, by the end of Session 1, every person in your group should have "broken the sound barrier" and said something, laying a foundation for more involvement later. We are always willing to press people to contribute. The *content* and *level* of what they share is up to them.

Frankly, we have found that the leader's attitude here is the most important factor. Your belief in your people and your eagerness to discover what they have to offer will be the key.

And what about the folk who participate too much? We have tried to plan for that too. The consistent use of smaller groupings craftily limits such persons' opportunities to dominate or derail the process. Continually mixing people in the smaller groupings also insures that no one is stuck all the time with a difficult person!

How to Be an Inviting Leader

One of the wonderful things about the bishops' approach in the *Foundation Document* is that, rather than instructing us about what we *ought* to think and do, they invite us to think and pray *with* them. That is precisely the kind of leadership style that will bring out the best in your group. That is why we emphasize some small yet not so insignificant things:

1. Using *we* rather than *you* language to emphasize we are all in this together.
2. Trying to avoid asking questions that seem to be fishing for one right answer.
3. Giving people a chance to think and talk about things in smaller groups.
4. *Sitting* with the group in a circle or semi-circle rather than *standing* up front.
5. Participating in the exercises, discussions, and pairings along with everyone else as a colleague.

In our experience, when we unwittingly through the way we lead reproduce a school classroom, we get a number of responses, none of them very helpful. Some people become passive and dependent while others become competitive. Still others, whose memories of school are not happy, get defensive and close up. As leaders, we feel we are not authorities on content. We *are* authorities on a *process* in which everyone shares as a part of the body of Christ.

How to Build Caring Community

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View and Congregating

The caring of a group makes the love of God believable and provides the context within which people are willing to risk new visions and new actions. We have incorporated in the basic design two basic techniques for building community: *seeing each other from God's point of view* and *congregating*. They are described under "Preparing for Next Time" in Session 1. We have made these a part of every program we have designed for the local church, and we can say truthfully that they have meant more to people than anything else we have done. If your group is resistant, we suggest that you say, **"The groups who tried out this material in advance thought these added a lot, so even if they may seem dumb, let's try them out faithfully for three weeks and then evaluate."**

Speaking of "seeing," if *even one* of your group does not know the names of everyone, we strongly urge you to use name tags that are big and clear enough for a near-sighted person to read across a room! Knowing one another's names makes a practical and symbolic difference in the early stages of group building. We have found that writing with a felt-tipped marker on one-eighth of a piece of light colored construction paper and using straight pins to attach them works well and can be reused for every session if needed.

Sharing

If you can find the time for it in your setting, we urge you to try a third method for nurturing a caring fellowship: a sharing time in which the group "checks in" with each person and how life is going for him or her this week. We usually introduce such a time in the context of trying to see each other from God's point of view, saying, **"It's pretty hard to try to see each other without knowing a bit about how his or her week is going. So let's each of us take a minute or two to share with the rest of us whatever you would like us to know about your week as we try to think about God's love for us each day. What will you be celebrating or going through or up against? Every person is equally valued and loved by God. There will be time for everyone to share."**

In succeeding sessions we suggest that each person say something about how the week has gone and about what she or he would like the group to know about the coming week. This is not a time for problem solving or advice giving; it is a time to listen. And you will find that in combination with the above techniques it builds caring community with incredible speed. Of course, it is simply a modern day version of the kind of sharing that went on in the early Wesleyan class meetings.

Special note for larger groups: If your group is larger than sixteen, we suggest that you divide into permanent sharing subgroups of six to eight people that reflect the composition of your total group with respect to age, sex, marital status, and so forth (put spouses in separate groups). Then, if your program is being done over a time span of nine to twelve weeks, remix the groups half way through.

Subdividing

This design repeatedly calls for subdividing your group into smaller groupings. Many leaders handle this by simply asking people to “get with someone” or to “find someone you haven’t worked with recently.” Most people simply will not do this. Others count off, which does not work very well after the first session because we tend to sit in the same places. We strongly recommend planning these subdivisions ahead of time and intentionally mixing people. The key is keeping track of who has been with whom. Here’s how you do it.

Let’s suppose we have divided our group for Session 1 in the following way:

<i>Groups of Four</i>	<i>Pairing for Session Two</i>
Joe	Joe
Susan	Beulah
Maxine	
William	Susan
	Steve
Beulah	
Steve	Maxine
Ellen	Ellen
Mary Beth	
	William
	Mary Beth

We enter these groupings by number on a simple chart (see example on page 10).

We put a 1 to indicate who was together in Session 1.

We put a 2 with a circle around it to show who was paired together during the week before the second session, thus distinguishing between groupings within sessions and pairings between them.

Suggestion: Go to the person at the bottom of the chart to make your marks. For example, Mary Beth and William are partners. Mary Beth is the last person on the lefthand side of the chart. Go to her and then across to the right until you come to William’s column.

When we start to decide who should be with whom in Session 2, we know that Joe has not been with Steve, Ellen, Mary Beth, Beulah, and so on. Of course, especially in a small group, people will be together more than once. But by noting the session number they have been together in, you can group people in Session 6 who were together in Session 1 rather than joining folk who worked with each other just the week before! In any grouping, try to keep people who were paired during the preceeding week from being in the same smaller groups. Initially try to put spouses in separate groups. The whole process is a pain, but it is well worth it. It works wonders in building community.

Chart for keeping track of subdivisions

X	Joe	Susan	Maxine	Wm.	Steve	Ellen	Beulah	Mary Beth
Joe	X							
Susan	1	X						
Maxine	1	1	X					
William	1	1	1	X				
Steve		②			X			
Ellen			②		1	X		
Beulah	②				1	1	X	
Mary Beth				②	1	1	1	X

We used to think that such praying, pairing, and sharing was necessary only in large churches or in those with many new members coming in. But considerable experience in small churches where everyone knows one another has changed our minds completely. Several years ago, we tested some of our material in a church with thirty-five members, seventeen of whom were in our program. When we evaluated at the end, thirteen of them did not identify our profound thoughts or wonderful leadership or creative Bible study as the most valuable aspect of the study. These thirteen folk said that "the way you helped us get to know each other" was what had meant the most!

How to Save Yourself a Lot of Time

If you have not done a lot of this intentional mixing of people before, the following list of groupings and possible adaptations for each session, though it may *seem* complicated, will save you an immense amount of time:

SESSION 1

- Form groups of four.
- If you have seven, eleven, fifteen, nineteen members plus the leader, the leader fills in to make even fours.

- If you have nine, thirteen, seventeen, twenty-one members plus the leader, you can add an extra person to one group. Tell them to be sure to talk to each person once, even though that means they will talk to some people more than once. Remind them there will be less time when three folk are working together.
- If you have ten, fourteen, eighteen, twenty-two plus the leader, you can create whatever number of groups of four plus one of three if you put yourself as leader in one of them.

SESSION 2

- See the notes in the session description itself.

SESSION 3

- Groupings are formed by the sign on the wall they choose. The *important thing* is for you as leader to choose a sign and share along with everyone else! Later, perhaps when they are working on the sermons, you can jot down who ended up with whom.

SESSION 4

- Form groups of four using the same approach as in Sessions 1 and 7.

SESSION 5

- Form four groups.
- If your group numbers less than seven plus the leader, form groups of two or three including yourself. Give one group two investigative tasks, whichever two you think your group would have the least to say about.
- If your group is larger than twenty members, form more groups and let more than one group work on an investigative "count."

SESSION 6

- Form groups of three, creating fours rather than pairs if you need to.

SESSION 7

- Create five groups:
 If you have nine or more plus the leader, simply divide into five groups.
 If you have fewer than nine, form pairs, including yourself, and give each pair more than one of the signs of vitality, as needed.
 If you have more than forty-five minutes and four pairs, you can work as a total group on one sign of vitality and then give each of the four groups one of the remaining signs.

SESSION 8

- If you use Option 2 as a way of gathering responses, you will need four groups. Having more than five to a group usually means that someone doesn't participate. Therefore if your group is larger than twenty, use groups of four and give more than one group a "concern," as needed. That will make for some duplication when the sheets are put up but you should be able to deal with that quickly.

This is a session in which a leader needs to circulate, moving sheets from group to group, encouraging, and so on.

SESSION 9

- Form groups of four using the same approach as in Session 1.

A special note: Even if it means they have to work with more material in less time, it is better to have two people working together than to give one person a solo assignment.

An Idea About Worship

Ask a different person or pair of people each week to open the next session with a brief prayer that is appropriate to the topic of the session and that will get the session off on the right foot. For instance, one might give as an example that the second session will be on confession, so such a prayer might ask God to give us grace to be open and honest and not defensive. This will encourage participation and encourage the people responsible to read the text!

For closings you may draw on the “Prayers of the Congregation” section on pages 97-110 of the *Foundation Document* and the numerous prayers in the margins of the text.

Gathering and Praise

SENTENCES YOU AS THE LEADER MIGHT SAY ARE PRINTED IN BOLD TYPE THROUGHOUT EACH SESSION PLAN.

Preview

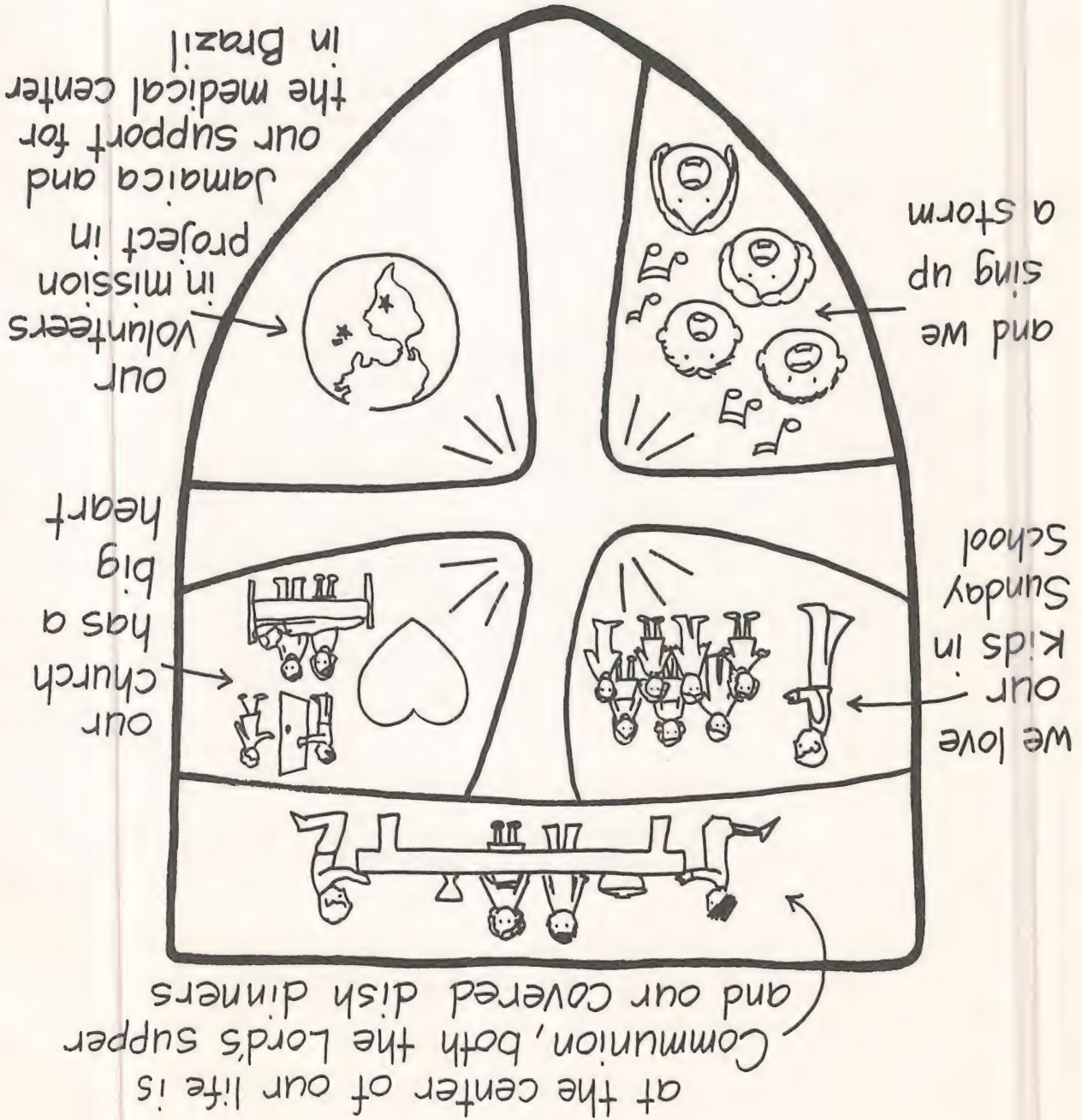
People in local congregations tend to approach things written for them by bishops with justifiable caution. What local church folk expect is indoctrination and exhortation. This session is designed to convince your group that *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples* is a very different sort of document. Far from laying something on the readers, it invites them to pray and think and dream about a new vision for the church in our day. It takes the people in the pews very seriously. By the end of the session we hope that the participants in this study will be ready, temporarily at least, to suspend their assumptions about what the church should be and do and to entertain some new and even wild possibilities. The coat of arms exercise aims at freeing them to do this by helping them first honor and celebrate what their life together has meant to them and many others through the years.

Overview

An Invitation to Dream	10 minutes
Why, Where, and How	5 minutes
Celebrating Our Congregation	30+ minutes
Congregational Timeline	20+ minutes
Preparing for Next Time	5 minutes
Closing	2 minutes

Have on Hand

1. Copies of the *Foundation Document* for everyone.
2. A large sheet of poster board for each group or cluster of groups you plan to have working on a coat of arms. On each sheet draw a shield, divided into sections. Cut out the shield.
3. Two or three felt tipped markers in vivid colors for each group or cluster.
4. Masking tape.



5. A sample coat of arms (see sample coat of arms on page 14).
6. A pencil or pen and writing paper for each person to make a list of the other people in the group for "Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View."
7. If you are going to do the Congregational Timeline, tape a long strip of shelf paper along the wall and draw a horizontal line across the middle of it. On the left as you face it put the year in which your church was founded. Depending on the thickness of your paper, you may need a backing sheet so the felt markers do not bleed through to the wall.
8. Material for name tags if you are going to use them. Make them ahead of time if you can.

An Invitation to Dream

(10 minutes)

On behalf of all 66 active and 58 retired bishops of The United Methodist Church, I want to welcome you to this study of their statement about vital congregations and faithful disciples. They've given us and thousands of church groups like us a remarkable and rather strange invitation.

Our Leader's Guide suggests that the best way to understand how remarkable and strange it is might be to do a little dreaming. So get as comfortable as you can, close your eyes, open your ears, and imagine your way into this dream. Remember as you listen that this *is* a dream, a playful idea meant to make us think about what means the most to us about our congregation.

This is a dream about our church located right here on [your church's street name] street in [your town]. It's a wild, improbable kind of dream. The kind of thing that just could not happen. But in this dream it has in fact happened.

Suddenly everything we have taken for granted as part of the life of our congregation has been swept away. Nothing *has* to be what it has always been before.

There is no bishop, no district superintendent, no pastor to run things. There are no apportionments to be met, no commitments to any program, nothing that has to be done simply because it has to be done. Everything is wide open. There are no schedules, no fixed meeting times, no standing committees that have to meet. There is no budget, no book of rules, no assured income, no plan of work, no church organization, no Sunday school, no women's society, no youth fellowship, no men's group, no church bulletin, no sermon in the works.

Whether we approve of it or not, this is our dream. And here we are sitting around in [choose a familiar gathering place in your church building], talking about our new situation. Though we don't know why this has come about, we do know one thing for sure. It can't last. We have [the number of weeks your group will be meeting], no more, to be and do as a congregation what we really want to be and do. We can wait out the time and then return to our old patterns, reinstating all the usual plans, programs, and schedules. Or we can use those [number of weeks again] to start something entirely new that might make the old unnecessary. In [number of weeks once more] everything—committees, programs, district superintendent, bishop, pastor—will return.

(Allow a few seconds of silence before you ask the following questions.)
How do you feel? What feelings, not thoughts, but *feelings* are you

experiencing? What two or three words would you choose to describe them? What would you most want to keep? (If your group is large, don't take too long with this.)

O.K., open your eyes. Let's go around the room and find out the words each person chose to describe the feelings this crazy dream prompted. (Kick this off yourself, trying if you honestly can do so to mention both a negative and a positive feeling.)

Well, regardless of how it feels, the bishops of our church are inviting us for the next [the number of weeks your group will be meeting] to enter into the spirit of that dream, to reexamine completely what it means for us to be the church, not taking anything for granted.

Why, Where, and How

(5 minutes)

Why are our bishops doing this? They have invested hundreds of hours of study and prayer over the three-year period leading up to the release of their Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document. Why such a sense of urgency? The "overview" to their Foundation Document puts it this way: "We, the people of God called United Methodist, have come to a critical turning point in our history. The world in which our heritage of faith seemed secure is passing away. We must choose now to follow the call of Jesus Christ into a new era. We must seek God's mission for us in a new millenium."

"As the turn of the century approaches, we know both the pain and the possibility of these times for our church. The obvious decline in membership of many of our congregations troubles us. We feel burdened by the increasing financial load our congregations are carrying. . . .

"The realization is dawning among us that we must be more intentional about being the church God calls us to be. The immense suffering of so many people in the world today overwhelms us. . . .

"Now God is calling us to journey. We do not like strange lands; we would rather stay in Egypt than cross the wilderness. But if we risk the journey, our faith will be vastly deepened" (pages 9-10).

In short, we badly need a new vision for our church. Where will it come from? We might expect a bunch of bishops to claim that they have such a vision and are about to hand it down to us. But they don't. The surprising thing is that *they* look to *us*! Listen:

"Here, in the congregation, the gospel must be made real if it is to be made real anywhere. Here, in the congregation, is the time and place to wrestle with basic questions about the nature and purpose of the church. Here, in the congregation, out of the ferment of current issues and the fervency of prayer, will arise a new imagination for the mission of tomorrow's church.

"The Spirit is calling us, in all our congregations, to a time of discernment—a time of searching, of self-examination, of listening for God's Word—that we may see the new direction in which God is leading us. We seek a fresh vision for the church that we know can only spring from God's vision for the world. Therefore we ask God for clarity of sight and oneness of will that we may perceive what God would have us do" (pages 10-11).

But how are we to go about such a radical task? The key to our search, say the bishops, is the way we worship. God, as we have come to know and worship God in Christ, is the one to whom we need to turn, and the pattern of

our worship each Sunday is our best clue as to how we can do that. Hence the bishops' Foundation Document is not a book of answers; it is a call to worshipful searching, a series of promptings for our own thinking and praying together. When you get a chance to look at the table of contents on page 3, you see that the book is not organized as a logical argument but as an order of worship.

Celebrating Our Congregation

(30+ minutes)

So it is that the bishops invite us first of all to celebrate, to give thanks for all that God has done for us as God's people, for each of the 42,000 United Methodist local church congregations around the globe.

Pages 23-32 of the Foundation Document contain some very eloquent and moving expressions of praise to God for all God has done for us. But the special focus of the thanksgiving is for gathering us into particular congregations. We thank God for gathering us into communities that make the love of God believable for you and me.

So to begin our search for a vision let's do some celebrating of our particular congregation. I'm going to pose three groups of questions about what we celebrate about our church, allowing a moment after each one for us to think to ourselves. Then each time we'll have a chance to share our response with a different person. To make that process easier, let's first divide ourselves into some smaller conversation groups by counting off by fours. (Help the groups get together by telling them where to gather in various parts of the room.)

1. Here's the first group of questions: Let's take a mental tour of our church building, picturing the various spaces. (Allow a moment for people to think.) Now we're in the sanctuary. Let's look around, taking in the windows, the symbols, the objects, the smell, the whole feel of the place. What special stories do you attach to these objects, these spaces? Pick out one to share that is especially meaningful to you, which expresses a quality of our congregation for which you are most thankful. (Allow another moment.) Turn to one member of your group and share what came to you. (Allow not more than three or four minutes.)
2. Here's the second set of questions: Let's take some time now to think about the people in our church who have meant something to you. Who represents for you the best in our church? Who has made the love of God real for you and how have they done that? (Allow a moment.) Share your answer with yet another person in your cluster. (Allow not more than three or four minutes.)
3. Now for the third bunch of questions: Let's look now at what our church is doing for others. Out of all that goes on in our congregation, what would be the first two ministries that you would describe to a friend who asked what was special about our church? (Allow a moment.) Tell your thoughts to another member of your group. (Allow not more than three or four minutes.)

In the middle ages, each family or noble house or guild had its own coat of arms, a design that celebrated what was special about that group. As a way of gathering up and celebrating what we've been sharing, let's try as groups to put together some coats of arms that picture some of the most special things

we've mentioned. Here's a sample shield I started on . . . (If your group numbers under thirty, give each smaller group a shield to work on. If it is larger, ask each group to come up with one thing they would like to see on the church's coat of arms and then ask three or four groups to combine on one shield. If there are no flat surfaces on which to work, the posterboards might be taped to various spots on the walls where people can cluster around them. Allow about ten minutes, circulating to encourage and urge groups to start drawing. Take some of this time while the groups are working to record who is with whom and to plan the pairings for the coming week. Ask each group or cluster to appoint someone to give a brief interpretation of their effort. After ten to fifteen minutes, whether they are finished or not, invite each group or cluster of groups to hold up their coat of arms for everyone to see while their interpreter explains their design. Lead a round of applause for each one.)

Congregational Timeline

(20+ minutes)

If you have sixty to ninety minutes to work with, try this wonderful way of getting people in touch with the story of your church and its broader setting in history. Use the shelf paper described in the "Have on Hand" section.

Let's create a timeline for our church. It all began in [the year your church was founded]. Let's put above the line some of the big events that have happened in the world around us across these years and that have had a big impact on us as a church. (Write these and their dates in rough historical order. Suggest a couple of things to get the group started.)

Now what are the big things—events, programs, people, experiences—we can remember from the history of [your church's name]? (Write these below the line. When your time is up or when people seem to be running out of memories, say . . .)

I'm sure we are going to remember more about our story as time goes on. Let's keep the timeline up so that we can add to it.

Preparing for Next Time

(5 minutes)

Before we close, let's look at how we might continue to live out what we've experienced together and prepare for next time.

Living Out

Each of us has remembered some people who have made God's love believable for us in this church. If they are still living, let's tell them how much they've meant to us either in person or with a note!

Preparing

Here are our copies of the Foundation Document.

When you get a chance, you'll want to look over the opening eighteen pages on which today's session was based, but the most important pages to read for next time are pages 33-44. In them our bishops suggest a pretty painful list of things they feel we need to confess as a church. Now we certainly don't have to

agree with everything they say. Let's look over their list and underline those items that seem to us to be right on target.

If it is a particularly hectic week, try to do at least the following in this order:

- read page 33 for an overview of what is coming,
- read pages 34-36 and then look at the ten areas of confession in bold type on pages 36-44,
- then read pages 45-49 to feel better as God intends,
- glance at the interesting list of what some congregations gave thanks for on pages 28-32.

Congregating

One of the greatest gifts God has given us is each other. We don't have to work alone at this business of being faithful disciples. That's why each week each of us will be given a different partner from our group to get together with for a cup of coffee, a meal, a walk, or, at the very least, a telephone call. It will give us a chance to continue our discussions from the sessions and to talk about the reading. Be sure to compare what you underlined in the Foundation Document as things we as a church ought to confess. But even more importantly, these meetings will help us get to know one another better and deepen our relationship as fellow disciples.

Our partners for this week are . . . (Announce who is going to be with whom and give the pairs a minute to confer about when and how they are going to get together.)

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 the apostle Paul writes, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if any one is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" The big new thing about discipleship is a new point of view toward everyone: *God's point of view!* This week let's try an experiment with being more intentional about that. Three or four times during the week take five to ten minutes to picture each person in our group, including yourself, individually. Remember what you can about that person—what they've said and shared, how they seem to be feeling, what they may be doing. Then think about how God views that person, the love God has for him or her. Hold that precious individual in that love for a moment and then move on to the next person. Let's try giving this gift of thoughtfulness to one another and see what happens. (If the group is larger than six persons, suggest that people make a list of the names of the group members and hand out paper and pencils or pens for those who need them for that purpose. Be sure they include themselves and you as leader.)

Closing

(2 minutes)

Close with a prayer of thankfulness for our church and for this gathering. You could use a prayer from pages 100-110 such as the one from Sabetha, Kansas, or from Omak-Riverside. You might end with "For the Spirit to stir in us a new vision above all else we pray" (page 97).

Survival Notes for Leaders:

1. Ask people to leave their name tags. Then you won't have to make new ones!
 2. Keep the coats of arms. You might want to display them in the fellowship hall or even in the sanctuary.
 3. Remind the group members to be sure to let you know ahead of time if they are going to miss a session. Explain the three reasons for doing so listed on page 6 in the Leadership Section.
-

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Preview

As the bishops point out, corporate confession is not something any of us like to do. We may complain *about* the church, but to confess *as* the church is another matter. Yet until we do own up to our sin, our turned in-ness as a community, we cannot receive the forgiveness and the freedom God offers us in Christ. Beginning with the sense of perspective that humor can provide, this session tries to help the group members look in the mirror the *Foundation Document* provides, confess without defensiveness what they see there, and hear clearly God's call to them to "rise and walk."

Overview

Another Picture of the Church	5 minutes
Making Their Confession Our Own	25+ minutes
How Christ Deals With Our Paralysis	15 minutes
Preparing for Next Time	5 minutes

Have on Hand

1. A New Testament from which to read Mark 2:1-12.
2. On newsprint, a sample confession (for example: We confess our discomfort with strangers).
3. The coats of arms from Session 1 posted up front.
4. A copy of "How God Has Changed Our Minds" for each person in the group (photocopied from pages 26-27 of this *Leader's Guide*).

Don't worry if your group has not read the assignment ahead of time. The sessions all are designed so that reading ahead is helpful but not necessary. We do not recommend that you read to them from the *Foundation Document* in the sessions unless that is specifically indicated. Our experience shows that people often tend to read more as they go along and get into the process.

Another Picture of the Church

(5 minutes)

In our last session we praised God for the many ways in which our congregation has made the love of God believable for us and many other people over the years. (Point to the coats of arms.) But for many of us there is another dimension to our experience of the church, a dimension that the following story portrays:

A man visited a great grease factory. Guided by an engineer, he spent virtually a whole day surveying the vast complex—a maze of pipes and tanks and vats with workers swarming around them, office buildings full of fast moving executives and frantic secretaries, laboratories, maintenance workshops, thousands of vehicles rolling in and out and about, a tremendous beehive of activity. At the end of the tour, sitting in the engineer's office and wiping his brow, he exclaimed, "My goodness, this must be the biggest grease factory in the world!"

"As a matter of fact it is," the engineer replied with pride. "We produce a billion barrels of grease a year."

"That's incredible," the guest said. "What are your principal markets for it?"

"Markets?" said the engineer.

"Yes, where do you sell the stuff? The Midwest? Northeast? Europe? South America?"

"We don't sell any of it," the engineer answered. "We use it all to lubricate the machinery."

The bishops put it this way: "We are very busy people. We are active in many causes. To an outsider we look like beehives of committee work and programs. But in our hearts we suffer emptiness and doubt. Busy with much serving, we know ourselves paralyzed by loss of contact with our Master, in whose company alone we find direction and purpose" (Foundation Document, page 36).

Much as we appreciate our life together and all that it has meant to us, we still must face the fact that for all our busyness—at every level from national boards to annual conferences to our own congregation—we are a paralyzed giant that could mean so much more than it does to our world.

What can we do about our inertia? We might expect the bishops to establish some new priorities for us to strive toward or to call us to follow yet another new program. But they don't. What they say all of us need to do before all else is to confess. We need to look at ourselves fearlessly and to name before God and one another all the ways in which we have failed to be an obedient church. For what we need first, they write, is not more fervor and activity but forgiveness. And so they invite us to consider confessing a long list of very painful things.

Making Their Confession Our Own

(25+ minutes)

One of the problems a lot of us have with prayers of confession is that they say things about us that we are not willing to acknowledge. Therefore, we want to take some time now to examine the bishops' list item by item—adding, subtracting, altering, making it our own. Because the list is long, let's divide our labors and form some smaller groups to tackle different parts of it.

If your group numbers under twenty in size, divide into five groups and give each group one of the following sections:

1. Page 37, line 1—page 39, line 4 on preoccupation with church business and conduct of church business making us feel distant from God.
2. Page 39, line 5—page 40, line 22 on nostalgia for the Protestant establishment and “elder brother syndrome.”
3. Page 40, line 23—page 42, line 8 on fear of others, mirroring the sins of the world, and passivity.
4. Page 42, line 9—page 43, line 5 on spiritual emptiness and hesitancy to pray.
5. Page 43, lines 6-25 and page 43, lines 26-40 on fear of dying and inertia deadening our dreams.

If the group is between twenty and thirty, divide into eight groups, giving each one of the following sections:

1. Page 36, lines 19-40 and page 43, lines 26-40 on inertia.
2. Page 37, lines 1-34 on preoccupation with church business.
3. Page 37, line 35—page 39, line 4 on our conduct of church business.
4. Page 39, line 5—page 40, line 22 on our nostalgia for the Protestant establishment.
5. Page 40, lines 23-41 on our fear of others.
6. Page 41, line 1—page 42, line 8 on our mirroring the sins of the world and being passive Christians.
7. Page 42, line 9—page 43, line 5 on our spiritual emptiness.
8. Page 43, lines 6-25 on our fear of dying.

If your group is larger than thirty-two, divide it into groups of four or five, giving some of what you consider to be the juicier sections to more than one.

Before we go to work, it might be good to remind ourselves that corporate confession is not something anybody enjoys. We are used to complaining about groups of which we are a part and even get a certain charge out of doing so. But acknowledging that we share responsibility for what’s wrong is an uncomfortable activity to say the least. It’s uncomfortable . . . but necessary! And we can do it because we know from the very beginning that God has promised to forgive and free us.

Here’s how we’ll work on this:

1. First, each of us will take the assigned passage and read it over carefully, underlining those sentences or phrases that seem particularly “on target” in describing our church. Let’s take five minutes for this.
2. Now in our small groups, let’s go through the passage again, comparing our reactions and why we felt the way we did. As we do, let’s try to come up with our own list of not more than four confessions that we feel ought to have top priority. Let’s express each one in the following way, “We confess that . . .” (Put up sample.) If we don’t think that our section applies to our church at all, let’s try to come up with some evidence of our faithfulness in that area. We’ll spend fifteen minutes on this.

Circulate among the groups, making sure that they understand the task and as time goes on, that they start making their lists. When the fifteen minutes are up, convene the whole group. Take two or three minutes at the start to get reactions from the groups about how they felt about the task.

What were some of our feelings as we worked on this task? Was it hard? easy?

Now let's hear the confessions each of our groups came up with. (Take them in the order of the passages on which they worked.)

How Christ Deals With Our Paralysis

(15 minutes)

Both in describing our situation and in talking about how Christ deals with it, the bishops refer to that very familiar story from the Gospel of Mark about the paralytic who was lowered through the roof. They write: "The United Methodist Church is the one on the stretcher . . ." (Foundation Document, page 35). They seem to think that what Christ did for that poor fellow on the pallet is what we as churches need as well.

So let's listen to that old story, try to imagine ourselves as the paralytic, and listen afresh to what Jesus has to say to us. (Read Mark 2:1-12.) O.K., here we are on the stretcher being carried to Jesus. What mixture of feelings do we have as we bump along? (Give the group members some time to think and then encourage them to volunteer their thoughts. Here are some possibilities to prime the pump or insert in the discussion: eagerness and hope, shame at being so helpless and dependent, anger at being carted about without having much say about it, guilt at having miserably failed to fulfill our responsibilities, apprehension about what we'll be expected to be and do if we are healed and can no longer lie around and be taken care of.)

Now Jesus is speaking to us. "My church, your sins are forgiven." He doesn't bawl us out. He doesn't tell us to shape up. He doesn't examine us to see if we are properly contrite. He doesn't offer us his sympathy for our plight. No, he offers us forgiveness. But then he doesn't, as we so often would like to, stop there. He speaks to us again, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk."

Now we've got a whole new set of feelings. What are some of them? (Again invite the group members to respond. Some possibilities: elation, gratitude, the urge to dance, wanting to tell the world, anxiety about having to take up responsibility, uncertainty about where to head.)

Christ forgives us as we are, but he never lets us stay as we are. His forgiveness not only frees us from our past; it also frees us for walking in newness of life. Next time we'll begin to consider just where we need to head, a vision for our future as a church.

Now as we close, let us rise and offer to one another words and signs of the forgiveness and challenge to new life Christ offers us together—a handshake, a hug, however the Spirit moves us, saying as we do, "*In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!*"

Preparing for Next Time

(5 minutes)

Living Out

Let's try to keep that good news of God's forgiveness front and center in our lives this week by putting that phrase, "*In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!*" on a sheet of paper and posting it on our desk or bathroom mirror or refrigerator where we will see it often! This also might be a good time to consider who else in our lives particularly needs to hear this word. And finally, is there anyone we need to confess to individually or as a group?

Preparing

Invite them to read pages 51-54 in the *Foundation Document*, the introduction and first section of "Hearing the Word of God." Give each of them a "How God Has Changed Our Minds" sheet, explaining that each of the vignettes describes how God has transformed God's people's way of looking at things at a particular point in church history. Ask them to read them over and choose the one or two changes they think we as the church most need today. Arrange for those who are not present to get copies and the assignment.

If you are doing only one session on "Hearing the Word," divide the group into three task forces, assigning each small group one of the following parts to read:

1. Pages 51-57, "Opening" and "Living by the Story of Jesus"
2. Pages 51-54, 58-66, "Opening," "Living by the Power of the Holy Spirit," and "Living by the Witness of the New Testament Church"
3. Pages 51-54, 66-74, "Opening" and "Living by the Stream of the Wesleyan Heritage"

Hand out the "How God Has Changed Our Minds" sheets (pages 26-27) with the same instructions.

Congregating

Give them their partners for the week and a moment to plan for meeting. Suggest that the vignettes should provide some great things to discuss.

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

If you have time, invite them to share their experience with this experiment. Urge those who haven't tried it to do so.

HOW GOD HAS CHANGED OUR MINDS

Six Vignettes From the History of God's People

God's Shocking Gift

We had our wish list all worked out. As faithful children of Israel, God's chosen people, we knew exactly what God must be most concerned about in our world: us! After all, who had maintained God's honor in the midst of this Godforsaken Gentile dominated world? Who had kept the Temple going and the Law taught? Who had done their best to preserve and live the Jewish way of life when it definitely would have been far easier to do otherwise? So we were clear about what God's special representative, God's Messiah, would do when he arrived. He would vindicate us. He would make sure that all the world would see in our prosperity and power how much being religious really pays off. Then he came. And all our expectations went down the drain! To whom did he go first? Tax collectors and prostitutes, lepers and looneys, the hungry and the homeless, the very people whose condition revealed, we thought, their disobedience to God. And what about us? He had the nerve to call us to repent! Instead of vindication he talked of reconciliation, of God's throwing a big party for *everyone* and wanting us to help bring it off. If that was the case, we weren't sure we wanted to come.

Who Rules the Roost?

We had hoped that he was one who would redeem Israel. We should have known better. The "powers that be" finally broke him. For a short while we dreamed of a world in which his kind of love actually called the shots. Then city hall, the religious establishment, the military, and public opinion all ganged up on him. And a cross on a hill spoke all too eloquently of who really does rule the roost in our world.

Then it happened. He came back and walked and talked and ate with us. And suddenly we saw that what seemed to be the end was only the beginning, that the cross on the hill was not the defeat but the triumph of God. There all the powers that conspired to do him in were shown up for what they are—second-rate imposters. Christ is Lord. And we are the agents of his unstoppable love.

See How Those Christians Love One Another!

To understand the wonder of that comment, which first century observers made again and again about our little congregations, you have to understand how much people in our day feared and even hated one another. Walls of hostility crisscrossed our world, and smart people stayed on their own side with their own kind. We didn't mess with strangers.

From *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples Leader's Guide* (Graded Press, 1990). Permission is granted to photocopy this page for church use.

And then we were invited to the church in the house down the street. They were the most diverse bunch of people we'd ever seen—Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, men and women, old and young. And argue! We were always disagreeing about something. But in spite of all that, we cared about one another, cared a lot. In fact, from time to time we actually got a kick out of one another. Why? What transformed a company of strangers from threats into genuine gifts to one another? It was beginning to see one another as persons whom God loved and believed in unconditionally, as precious people for whom Christ died.

A Royal Priesthood

Religions in our first century world were big on professional secrets. Their priests were the guardians of a special mysterious knowledge available only to a few highly qualified souls, knowledge of how to find God and abundant life.

That's why it was big news when a whole company of ordinary people announced that God's Spirit moved in and through *all* of them and that they were fully authorized to invite *everyone* into God's presence. Their message was astounding; their fellowship made it believable.

Behold, Now Is the Day of Salvation

The mass of us regular people in eighteenth century England didn't feel that God was very interested in us and our struggles to stay alive. God was for the privileged few, not for poor working people such as we. Salvation had to do with life after death, not with the living death we were experiencing in the mines and factories.

So when an Oxford professor had the nerve to stand before a field full of us and calmly announce that God loved us and offered us new life here and now, no strings attached, it was electrifying. You've no idea how exciting it was to realize that all those extravagant New Testament promises were true for us immediately . . . or do you?

Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together in My Name

Membership in the church was always something we took for granted. We went now and then. We gave a bit. It was just a routine part of our life. Then Mr. Wesley's preaching swept us into one of his societies. We found ourselves taking part in a small group in which people honestly shared their struggles and their triumphs and pressed each other to grow. We mattered. And what had been a formality before became the living center of our lives.

From *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples Leader's Guide* (Graded Press, 1990). Permission is granted to photocopy this page for church use.

Hearing the Word of God

Preview

As a way of gathering together the vast amount of material in the “Hearing the Word” section of the *Foundation Document*, this session focuses on some of the most startling changes in point of view experienced by those who encountered Jesus, by those who belonged to the church in New Testament times, and by those caught up in the Wesleyan revival in England. We try to find there in the stories of what God has done with God’s people in the past the good news that we as contemporary United Methodist Christians most need to hear.

Overview

Listening for the Word	5 minutes
Sharing and “Sermon” Preparation	15+ minutes
Proclaiming the Word	20 minutes
Preparing for Next Time	5 minutes

Have on Hand

1. Signs with the titles of each of the vignettes from “How God Has Changed Our Minds” on pages 26-27 and masking tape to put them up.
2. Extra copies of “How God Has Changed Our Minds” for those who did not get them last time or failed to bring them to the session (photocopied from pages 26-27 of this *Leader’s Guide*).
3. The key words *disillusionment* and *disenchantment* written on newsprint or chalkboard for all to see.

Listening for the Word

(5 minutes)

According to William Bridges, who has written a book on transitions and how human beings respond to them, there are two very different ways in which we react to the challenge of a change in our lives: *disillusionment* and *disenchantment*. Disillusioned people immediately conclude that the source of all their trouble lies outside of themselves. “We picked the wrong spouse, the

wrong job, the wrong pastor, the wrong bishop, the wrong church. We don't need to change the script; only the actors." Disenchanted people, on the other hand, recognize that at least a part of the trouble is in the way they look at things. Their old point of view no longer fits a changed situation. What's needed is a new perspective on things, a new or *reenchantment*.

In our last session the bishops invited us to confess with them that we all are a part of the problem with The United Methodist Church today, to confess and to receive assurance that God forgives us and calls us to rise and walk in freedom as God's people in a new day. But walk where? Like the paralytic in the Gospel story, like the congregation in the dream, like any person who is experiencing disenchantment, we need a new vision of what we are called to be and to do. And so, as we do every Sunday morning, we turn to the story of God's dealings with God's people in the past, searching there for clues to God's word for us today.

The bishops suggest that we concentrate our search on three particular chapters of the Christian story: the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament church, and the Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth century. In each of these chapters God acted in totally unexpected ways to reverse people's understanding of God's will for their lives.

The "How God Has Changed Our Minds" sheet we've been looking over this week tries to capture in six vignettes the major ways in which God acted in those times when people faced crises to give them a new enchantment, an entirely new way of looking at their situation. (Make sure that everyone has a copy to look at.)

Take a moment now to refresh your memory of them, considering as you do whether or not each of them is a change that God may be trying to work in the way *we* look at things. As you review them, ask yourself: "Which one of these do we as a church *most* need to hear?"

Sharing and "Sermon" Preparation

(15+ minutes)

(Post the signs around the room while the group members are rereading the sheet and deciding.) As you see, there are signs for each of the vignettes around the room. Let's rise and walk to the title of the reenchantment that we feel *most* needs to happen for us. (Make sure they do in fact physically move. We have found that when people are asked only to raise their hands, some will not commit themselves. When everyone has moved to the sign of their choice, continue . . .)

Let's tell the folk at our sign why we made the choice. (If there is only one person at a sign, let him or her combine with another small group to share. If there are more than four or five at one sign, divide them into two groups. The goal is to have groups that are no larger than three or four for this sharing and for the next task.)

(After no more than four or five minutes, continue.) By our feet we have said that we think there is in our chosen vignette some particularly good news for us as a church. Therefore our next task is to put that good news in a sermon. Well, maybe not a whole sermon. How about the main message for a sermon that helps the rest of us catch a new vision? What's the main idea from your vignette that you would like for our whole congregation to hear?

Proclaiming the Word

(20 minutes)

It's sermon time! Let's hear your message and a word or two about why you feel it's important. We should have about ____ minutes to hear and talk about each one. (How long you can give each group will depend on the number of groups and the time.)

Preparing for Next Time

(5 minutes)

Living Out

We've identified quite a bit of good news our congregation needs to hear. Let's share it! We all know how to gossip. This week let's spread the good news we've identified. Let's gossip the gospel!

Preparing

In preparation for the next session, ask the group members to read pages 58-66, "Living by the Power of the Holy Spirit" and "Living by the Witness of the New Testament Church."

If you are going directly to Session 6, introduce the assignment as follows: **The reading for our next session is "Claiming Our Baptism," pages 87-95 in the Foundation Document. Try to do some thinking about your own experience of baptism. Do you know when and where and by whom you were baptized? What has it meant to you over the years? What is the most meaningful baptism you have witnessed? Why?**

Congregating

Assign partners. Suggest that they might want to talk about the ways in which they are gossiping the gospel this week. If you are moving directly to Session 6, suggest that they might share their reflections on the questions about baptism.

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

Remind people of this experiment. Suggest making a new list so they think of folk in a different order.

Living by the Power of the Holy Spirit and the Witness of the New Testament Church

Preview

Quite simply, the hope of this session is that by the power of that same Spirit that so “fired up” the New Testament church, your group will feel, as never before, gifted and empowered to make the love of God believable for one another and for the world.

Overview

Introduction	5 minutes
Exploring Our Gifts	10 minutes
Sharing Our Gifts	20+ minutes
Celebrating Our Gifts	10 minutes

Have on Hand

1. A sheet of writing paper and a pencil or pen for each person.
2. Newsprint to post with directions for sharing our gifts (see below).
3. Take a large piece of paper and outline on it the shape of your church building. Then divide the silhouette into as many “stones” as your group has members, making their shapes as varied as possible (see sample on page 32). If possible, make each “stone” at least four by six inches in size. Write “top” lightly in pencil at the top of each piece. Cut out the “stones,” creating a jigsaw puzzle.
4. Take a second sheet of paper of equal or larger size, repeat the drawing of the outline of the church building on it, and either spread it on a table or mount it on the wall so that the puzzle can be assembled on it.
5. Tear off a small piece of masking tape for each member of the group to use in mounting his or her piece of the picture or have a couple of rolls of scotch tape available.
6. A felt tipped marker for each person for writing on the “stones.”

Model for a Group of Eleven Including Leader(s)



Introduction

(5 minutes)

When you stop to think about it, after Easter, after the whole amazing series of Holy Week events took place, what tangible evidence was left that anything had happened? The only visible sign was a congregation! It was a diverse bunch of very ordinary human beings, not very outstanding or remarkable by any standard. And yet, the first century world quickly began to sense that something incredible was happening within this very human fellowship. A strange Spirit was at work in their midst, drawing them together and empowering them to care not only for one another but for the world around them. It was their love and courage that made the good news believable.

Now if you are anything like me, you tend to think of that as something wonderful that happened a long, long time ago. Our bishops, however, have the strange and exciting idea that it is still going on. They believe that the very same Holy Spirit lives and moves among *us*, seeking to make us a healing and freeing fellowship that will be Christ's body in today's world. We may object that we are not capable of such an effort, that we don't have the gifts for it. Don't worry, say the bishops. "The Holy Spirit bestows gifts with which disciples can serve the Lord, and creates communities within which those gifts can be nurtured and empowered" (Foundation Document, page 59).

Exploring Our Gifts

(10 minutes)

Today we are going to test their assertion. We are going to take a look at just how gifted we are. For this exploration each of us will need a piece of paper and a pencil or pen. To start our thinking, let's listen to what the bishops have to say about the variety of gifts the Spirit gives: (Read from page 59, line 28, through page 60, line 13.)

1. Think to yourself: What are some of the ways in which you hope you've been a gift to this group or to persons in it? Jot down whatever comes to you. Remember that your gifts don't have to be fantastic or flashy things. You may have the gift of honest questioning. Or the gift of making a newcomer feel at home. Or the gift of appreciating people and letting them know it. Make a list. (Allow about three minutes.)
2. But the Spirit's gifts are not just for us as a group; they are given to empower and equip us for ministry in Christ's name in the everyday world. What are some of the gifts you feel you have exercised to make God's love more real in the world beyond this cozy fellowship of ours? in your family? on the job? in this community? Once again, they don't have to be earthshaking to be worth noting. (Allow about three minutes.)
3. Finally, let's think about how the Spirit is prompting us to grow. What gift for ministry do you especially hope you can develop? What do you feel you and God and maybe your friends need to work on? (Allow another three minutes.)

Sharing Our Gifts

(20+ minutes)

According to the bishops, these gifts don't just come to isolated individuals; the Spirit nurtures them in us through the Christian fellowship. We're going to experience a bit of that now in some smaller groups. Each of us will have a

chance to comment about at least two of his or her gifts and the rest of us will have a chance to provide further evidence of them or mention additional gifts we see. We'll have five minutes apiece. And since all of us are equally valuable in God's sight, let's make sure that we use all of each person's time, even for the shy people among us. (Divide the group into fours.)

Celebrating Our Gifts

(10 minutes)

The bishops use a wonderful New Testament image to talk about what we've just been experiencing together: "By the power of the Holy Spirit, disciples are built up . . . into one household . . . of faith. Set close to Christ, the chief cornerstone, faithful disciples become 'living stones.' . . . Every disciple is different; each is like a stone with a peculiar shape and size and its own oddities. But aligned on Christ these stones make up a house of service to the Lord" (Foundation Document, page 60).

Well, here is a unique stone to stand for each of us! (Pass out the paper "stones" prepared ahead of time.) In a minute we will have a chance to fit them together. But first, let's write on our stones one of the gifts we hope we've given to the community and one of the gifts we hope we are using in ministry in the world. (Allow some time.) Now let's sign our stones and see how they go together. (Encourage the folk to put the puzzle together. Then invite them to stand with their hands joined or arms around each other facing the completed picture.)

Let us thank God for the many ways in which we are gifts to one another and the world. For each of these special stones, let's say a prayer of thanks. I will say, "For Helen!" Then let all of us say, "O God, we thank you for Helen and her special gifts." (When you have given thanks for each person, invite everyone to sing the doxology or simply say a loud *Amen!*)

Preparing for Next Time

Living Out

(Suggest to the group:) To follow up our work in this session, let's try to do something about that gift for ministry each of us identified—talking to someone about it; taking a first step toward getting some training; or most of all, exercising it. Gifts, like muscles, grow only when you use them.

Preparing

Ask the group to read "Living by the Stream of the Wesleyan Heritage," pages 66-74 in the *Foundation Document*.

Congregating

Assign partners for the week. Suggest that they might want to talk about the "gift development" they are working on and, also, to discuss in the light of the reading how Wesleyan our congregation is.

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

Suggest that they particularly might want to think about one another's gifts this week and to tell their fellow group members what they come up with.

Hearing the Word in Our Wesleyan Heritage

Preview

In this session your group members become teams of assistant district attorneys trying to discover indictable evidence in your congregation of various characteristics of that “dangerous and illegal” movement called “Wesleyanism.” This playful approach will help group members take a fresh look at the relevance of our Wesleyan heritage for congregational life today and prepare them for a more systematic evaluation of your congregation’s life and work next week.

Overview

Investigative Work	20+ minutes
Conference	20+ minutes
Preparing for Next Time	5 minutes

Have on Hand

1. Copies of the “Instructions from the DA” for everyone (photocopied from page 38 of this Guide).
2. Newsprint taped up on the wall and a felt tipped marker.

Investigative Work (20+ minutes)

In our search for a new vision of what God calls us to be and do today, our bishops have led us to look at the story of Jesus and at the witness of the early church. This week they invite us to examine our Wesleyan heritage. As a different and fun way of doing this, beginning now, we are going to become assistant district attorneys in the Nation of Status Quo.

My friends, you may think that the Wesleyan movement is past history, something interesting that happened way back in eighteenth century England. What you need to realize is that it still exists today and that it is extremely

dangerous! You are well aware, of course, of all those churches throughout the world that go by the name of United Methodist. Well, don't be deceived by the different title. Some of them harbor active Wesleyan societies. And these groups are dead set on doing what we of the Nation of Status Quo simply cannot tolerate: They want to change things! They want nothing less than to reform individual lives, the church, and whole societies!

That's why we have the Anti-Wesleyan Law, making it illegal to be a Wesleyan Christian. And that's why we are here this morning. The DA has given us as assistant district attorneys the task of investigating [your church's name] to see if we can find enough evidence of Wesleyanism to warrant any indictments. Here are the instructions. (Hand out the "Instructions from the DA.") We are supposed to divide into four investigative teams, each one looking for evidence with regard to one of the counts. (Subdivide into four groups and give each a different count to work on.) In twenty minutes we'll reconvene as a total group to report.

Conference

(20+ minutes)

Let's hold a conference now to review the results of our investigations. **Group one:** What count were you investigating and what did you find out? (You may need to use some prompting questions here if the group is not forthcoming about its discussion. For example: Where in our church's life did you look for evidence? What kinds of things were you looking for? What did you find? How did you decide whether or not your evidence would be admissible?)

(After everyone has reported, continue.) Leaving our investigative roles behind, what did you wish you had found *more* evidence of in our congregation's life and work? Later on we are going to do a more thorough evaluation, so let's make a list for future reference. (Start the ball rolling with an observation of your own. List their responses.)

We suggest that you conclude this exercise with a prayer that honestly shares with God the mixture of feelings the exercise probably has stirred up. Here's an example:

O God, we thank you for our Wesleyan heritage. We celebrate the ways in which it is reflected in our church today. But you know all too well the ways in which we have failed to be true to it. We lack both the joy and the discipline of those early Methodists. Forgive us. Help us see where we need to change. And give us the courage to do it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Preparing for Next Time

(5 minutes)

Living Out

In the very next church meeting we attend outside this group, let's try to share something from our discussion.

Preparing

The reading for our next session is "Claiming Our Baptism," pages 87-95 in the Foundation Document. Try to do some thinking about your own

experience of baptism. Do you know when and where and by whom you were baptized? What has it meant to you over the years? What is the most meaningful baptism you have witnessed? What made it meaningful?

Congregating

Assign partners for the week. Suggest that both the discussion of the Wesleyan heritage and the baptism questions should provide some great things to discuss.

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

We've been with one another and been thinking about one another for some time now. This week think about how your perceptions of others in the group may have changed. Imagine God's love enfolding each of them.

INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE DA

We cannot go to the Grand Jury with anything flimsy. We need *hard* evidence—names, places, situations, actions. Some groups in the church may be indictable and others not; please be specific. You are investigating [name of your church] United Methodist Church.

Count 1: Transforming Meeting

Read page 58, lines 6-26, in the *Foundation Document*. Think of all the sorts of meetings in the church. Of course, just meeting isn't going to be sufficient for indictment. We will have to be able to prove that the meetings are in fact changing lives. Look at the level of participation and investment of the members. How deeply do they share their lives? How faithfully do they participate? If we secretly planted a microphone, could we get enough proof?

Count 2: Serious Seeking

Read page 59, line 31—page 60, line 14, in the *Foundation Document*. This one may be harder to prove. One place to look is their worship service. What evidence can you detect there that people feel truly forgiven and freed? Look for the telltale signs of Wesleyan liveliness, joy, and enthusiasm, for example, in their singing. Where in worship or elsewhere are they wrestling with life and death issues and searching for the presence and power of God right now?

Count 3: Holy Living

Read page 60, line 19—page 62, line 14, in the *Foundation Document*. Here we have some specific rules to go by. What signs can you discover that people are living differently from the rest of the world, that they are dedicated, disciplined, and caring? Do they have an active life of prayer, worship, study, and fasting? Do they give food to the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick or in prison, and support one another in the necessities of life? Are they good stewards of God's resources? Would subpoenaing their tax records and church budget provide proof of these?

Count 4: Covenant Connectionalism

Read page 62, line 17—page 64, line 14, in the *Foundation Document*. One thing that makes these Wesleyan societies so powerfully subversive is the way in which they work together to support one another and reform both the church and the nation. Examine how the church works with and supports other congregations in the United Methodist connection. Look too at how it joins with other Christian congregations in concern for the community and world. What the law bans in these areas is *critical love*. Just being critical of the larger church and the society is *not* an indictable offense. Neither is being uncritically loyal to the church and the nation. It is the combination we're looking for.

From *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples Leader's Guide* (Graded Press, 1990). Permission is granted to photocopy this page for church use.

Claiming Our Baptism

Preview

The bishops call us to close the baptism gap, the gap between all that has been given to us in our baptism and what we actually claim, celebrate, and live out. This session attempts to dramatize the gap and then to challenge the group members to do something about closing it in their own lives and in the life of the congregation.

Overview

A Fantasy Trip	5 minutes
A Reality Trip	15 minutes
Closing the Gap	20+ minutes
Preparing for Next Time	5 minutes

Have On Hand

1. Four copies of each voucher (photocopied from page 42 of this *Leader's Guide*) for each person.
2. On chalkboard or newsprint, the questions about the reality trip.
3. A chalkboard or newsprint on which to record ideas for closing the gap.
4. Copies for each person of "Looking at Our Congregation's Life and Work," photocopied from page 43.

A Fantasy Trip

(5 minutes)

We've been in search of new vision for our church. Our focus has been on where God calls us *as a congregation* to head. Now we turn, guided by the bishops' Foundation Document, to look at how we *as individuals* fit into the picture.

But before we do, as a way of warming up, let's take a brief fantasy trip. Unless I miss my guess, it will be a very pleasant trip. In fact, if you are anything like me, it is a trip that you have taken before. Relax . . . take some deep breaths . . . close your eyes . . . unleash your imagination. . . .

It's been a hard day and you are just about to sit down to supper when the phone rings. You heave a sigh as you get up and go to pick up the receiver. It's probably one of those sales promotions or a plea for a contribution. They all call around suppertime. Can't people have some peace in their own homes?

You answer. An excited voice asks, "Is this . . . ? and says your name. You reply uneasily, "Yes."

The voice goes on, "This is Leonard White, senior partner of Slopes, Gordon, Fitzgerald, and White, Public Accountants. We are the official accountants of The Publishers Sweepstakes. I am happy to inform you that you have won the grand prize of \$10,000,000! That's \$1,000,000 each year for the next ten years."

The voice goes on about arrangements and details and such, but let's stop right there and consider what thoughts and feelings you're experiencing. Keep your eyes closed as you think about these questions. (Pause after each question to give people time to think.)

- How do you feel?
- What thoughts are going through your mind?
- How will this affect what you do each day?
- What will it mean for your relationships with other people?
- What's the first thing you plan to do?
- Will this cause any difficulties that you can see?

O.K., tear yourself away from this fantasy, open your eyes, and return to reality. Take a minute to share some of your reactions with the person next to you. (Help people pair themselves with those next to them, separating husbands and wives.)

A Reality Trip

(15 minutes)

It certainly is fascinating to think about the difference that having all that money would make. Just knowing it was ours would give a whole new feel to things. But it's interesting to consider what all that money *can't* do for us.

1. It *can't* make us feel good about ourselves. It *can't* help us feel that we are acceptable and lovable.
2. It *can't* buy us real friends or help us truly belong to a group that cares about us and counts on us.
3. And it *can't* make our lives meaningful.

However, there is something that can do all three of these things. And it's not a fantasy about some sweepstakes. It's a reality of our faith! You are about to receive official *renotification* of it in the form of three vouchers. Here's voucher number one! (Hand out a copy of the first voucher on page 42 to each person. Allow a moment or two for them to read it. Then hand out the second and third vouchers in the same way, allowing a moment after each for people to read them.)

Whether you were baptized as an infant, a child, a young person, or an adult and whether you were sprinkled, poured on, or dunked, the meanings are the same. And they are real! Yet, according to the bishops, a lot of us don't seem to realize that those meanings are true for us. In the fantasy about the sweepstakes did anybody consider *not* picking up the money? Let's take a few minutes now to think to ourselves about our reactions to the reality represented by these vouchers. (Pause after each question to give people time to think.)

- How did you feel when you read each voucher?
- How did your reaction compare with your response to the fantasy about the money? Was it easier or harder to get excited about it?
- Why do you suppose that was?
- Let's share our answers in groups of three. (Divide the group members into trios and announce they have about ten minutes to talk.)

Closing the Gap

(20+ minutes)

It's pretty clear that for many of us there is a gap between all the great things that are true of us by virtue of our baptism and our actual experiencing of those promises. Sticking with our same small groups, let's see what ideas we have for making what each of these vouchers stands for more real for everybody in our church. We'll take ten minutes to talk; then we'll pool our wisdom.

Gather the ideas for each of the vouchers, starting with a different group each time and asking for only one idea at a time from each group, listing them on the chalkboard or newsprint. When you get a suggestion from a group, immediately check to see if other groups had the same idea and put a check mark for each one to indicate that. This will cut down on duplication and time, yet help groups feel that they are contributing.

Preparing for Next Time

(5 minutes)

Continuing

We've been reminded of our baptism and all that it means. But there are a lot of our friends and fellow members who, though they need the message badly, are living as if it never happened. So . . . (Hand each person three copies of each voucher.) Let's take a couple of minutes now to be silent and to think and pray about the people in our lives who need these special delivery!

Preparing

Give each person a copy of "Looking at Our Congregation's Life and Work" (page 43), and take a moment or two to go over it with the group, encouraging them in every way you can to read the page references and write down their "likes" and "concerns" in each area of your church's life. The next session depends on their having given thought to this ahead of time. Arrange for sheets to get to those who are not present for this session.

Congregating

Assign partners for the week, suggesting that they confer about their "likes" and "concerns."

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

As you try to see each other from God's point of view, think about whether there is some small way you might make God's promises in baptism more real to any of them.

OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION

You hereby are notified that you have been singled out for adoption as one of God's own special children and an heir of life with God forever. God knows and loves you completely and wants you to know and love God in a joyful new life of fellowship beginning now.

This offer has your name on it and is non-transferrable and irrevocable. It is sealed by my life and death and resurrection. Nothing in your past, your present, or your future, in fact nothing in the whole world can cancel it. It is yours for the taking.

Jesus of Nazareth

authorized signature

OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION

You hereby are notified that a special place has been reserved for you in the marching caravan of God. You have been selected to join a procession that has been on the move for over three thousand years and has included such notable pilgrims as Moses, Deborah, Isaiah, Ruth, Teresa, Martin Luther, Susanna Wesley, Martin Luther King, Jr., and countless other gifted persons such as you.

Our destination is a world governed by God's love. Our departure time is now. We need you.

Jesus of Nazareth

authorized signature

OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION

You hereby are notified that you are chosen, appointed, fully authorized, and empowered as a representative of the living God. You are charged with responsibility for making God's love known and believable. You have unique talents and experience to use in your position and among the people your life touches.

The world is starved for love and for hope. I have let you in on where they can be found. I am counting on you.

Jesus of Nazareth

authorized signature

LOOKING AT OUR CONGREGATION'S LIFE AND WORK

After reading what the bishops have to say about each of the following signs of vitality in congregational life, specify what you really like and then one major concern you have about our church's life and work in that area. For example:

I like the warmth and caring of our congregation.

I am concerned that new people in town don't seem to feel welcome and included.

WORSHIPING IN WAY THAT CALLS PEOPLE TO CONVERSION AND COMMITMENT (pages 113-15)

I like . . .

I am concerned that . . .

FORMING DISCIPLES (pages 116-17)

I like . . .

I am concerned that . . .

PRACTICING CARE AND HOSPITALITY (pages 117-18)

I like . . .

I am concerned that . . .

SEEKING MORAL DISCERNMENT, RAISING UP NEW LEADERS, AND EQUIPPING THE PEOPLE OF GOD FOR WITNESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE (pages 118-120)

I like . . .

I am concerned that . . .

JOINING IN MINISTRIES OF JUSTICE, HOPE, AND PEACE AND WITNESSING TO SALVATION IN CHRIST (pages 120-23)

I like . . .

I am concerned that . . .

From *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples Leader's Guide* (Graded Press, 1990). Permission is granted to photocopy this page for church use.

Offering Our Response (Part I)

Preview

From the very beginning the people called “*Methodists*” have been known for their connectionalism, for the way in which local societies or congregations have been related to one another in a vast and impressive organization. Sometimes we in local churches experience this organization as a top-down hierarchy trying to press us into the same identical mold, almost as if we were franchises in some ecclesiastical fast-food chain! The *Foundation Document*, however, presents a very different picture of what it means to be connected as United Methodists. Rather than telling us what to be and do, the bishops invite us to recognize and celebrate our uniqueness as a Christian fellowship. Rather than evaluating us by some national standard of excellence, they ask us to check our own vital signs as a church. Rather than expecting us to compete with other churches, they call on us to search for how we can offer our unique gifts as a church in making our own unique response to God’s call to mission.

In this study, as in worship, the time of offering is when “the rubber hits the road,” the time when we must decide what we will do about all that God has done for us. Like the people in the dream we talked about in Session 1, we must choose whether we are going to return to the way we were or to dare something different. These next two sessions are designed to help your group come up with at least three new visions for your church’s future plus some energy and ideas about how you might “rise and walk” toward those visions. It might be encouraging for you to know that the planning method you’re being asked to try has been used in countless churches of all sorts and that it rarely fails to excite and energize people. If you can give more time to it, do so; it will be well worth it.

Overview

Looking at Our Congregation’s Life and Work	30+ minutes
Choosing Our Primary Concerns	10+ minutes
Preparing for Next Time	5 minutes

Have on Hand

1. Five large sheets of newsprint, each with one of the headings from the worksheet on page 43.
2. At least five additional large sheets of newsprint.
3. Masking tape.
4. Four one-inch-square pieces of construction paper of the same color for each person.
5. A small sheet of paper and a pencil for each person.
6. Additional copies of "Looking at Our Congregation's Life and Work" (photocopied from page 43) for those who forgot to bring it.

Looking At Our Congregation's Life and Work (30+ minutes)

In our search for a new vision for the church today we've been following the pattern of our worship. We've praised God for all God's gifts, especially our church and its heritage. We've confessed and been assured of God's grace. We've listened for God's Word. We've remembered and reclaimed our baptism. And now it's time for us to decide what we will do about all that God has done for us. In these next two sessions we will be working together on preparing an offering. It will be our own vision of God's priorities for our church's growth in vitality and faithfulness.

But before we look at where we think we ought to go, let's look at where we are. Using the key areas of congregational life the bishops have identified, let's do some evaluating of ourselves as a church.

Divide into five teams, asking each team to read a different part as indicated on the worksheet, listing on the newsprint first what team members *most* like. Then, after drawing a line across the sheet below them, write their one or two *major* concerns about the congregation in that particular area of its life. Allow twenty minutes.

Post the five lists of likes and concerns side by side. Read each list aloud and invite the total group to add any likes or concerns that come to mind.

Choosing Our Primary Concerns (10+ minutes)

Well, we have quite a list of concerns, all of them very real. Take a moment now to look them over. As you do, ask yourself which four of these does God want us to give top priority now? Which ones do I feel we ought to think about addressing right away?

Give four one-inch-square pieces of construction paper to each person along with a strip of masking tape. Demonstrate how to make a small doughnut of tape for the back of each piece.

Let's come forward now and put our squares beside the four concerns we've chosen.

Look together with the group at how the choices are clustered. If there are obviously four major concerns for the group, move on to "Preparing for Next Time." If not, ask the group if they can see a couple of concerns that garnered a number of votes and that are virtually identical. *Do not, however, give in to the temptation to make very general combinations. They will be too hard to*

deal with concretely in the next step. If you still have more than four choices, circle the one or two or three that have “made it,” remove the squares from the others, and let the group take a new vote, this time voting for only one or two. In order for the rest of this process to work it is *absolutely essential* to narrow the list to four or five concerns.

Preparing for Next Time

(5 minutes)

Living Out

We all are hereby appointed official visionaries for [name your church]. Our task during the coming week is to take each of these four top priority concerns that we have identified and to turn it into a wish, a vision of how we would like to see that concern responded to. Each of us is responsible for bringing back at least one specific idea about how we as a church might meet each of these needs. And let's not let ourselves be too limited by what we think is possible. Let's put our imaginations to work and do some dreaming. Suppose the concern was that new people don't feel welcome. Simply saying that you wish people would feel welcome is too general to be of much help. Try to be concrete. For example:

- I wish specific church members would volunteer or be asked to invite new people to come with them to church dinners and sit with them.
- I wish that during Lent we would have a special study program in small groups in which people who are old, young, new to church, and established members would be mixed intentionally for five weeks.
- I wish next Sunday the service would be shortened by ten minutes and people told that the last act of worship would be a time of fellowship.
- I wish next Sunday we could begin by having coffee together for the first few minutes of the worship hour.

Hand out paper and pencils for people to list the four priority concerns they will be working with.

Preparing

Ask them to read the “Signs of Faithfulness in Discipleship” section, pages 123-31.

Congregating

Assign partners for the week and suggest that they compare notes on their wishes.

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

Try starting at a different point in your list. You might want to make a phone call between sessions to someone you haven't been paired with.

Offering Our Response (Part II)

Preview

The bishops ask, “With what act of daring will today’s United Methodists break loose from established molds and announce the good news of Christ?” (page 122). The aim of this session is to help the group entertain some “acts of daring,” some visions of how our life together might be far more vital and exciting and faithful than it is. People raised in our pragmatic, can-do society do not have a lot of practice with creative dreaming, but you may be surprised by how quickly they get into it and how energizing such a process is. As in the last session, if you can, give more time to this process. It will be well worth it.

Overview

Sharing Our Visions	15+ minutes
Prioritizing Visions	5+ minutes
Envisioning Our Future	15+ minutes
Telling Our Stories	10+ minutes
Preparing for Next Time	2 minutes

Have on Hand

1. A sheet of newsprint for each major concern identified in the last session with that concern written at the top.
2. Felt tipped markers.
3. Masking tape.
4. A sheet of newsprint with the prompts for the stories written on it.
5. Three different colored one-inch-square pieces of construction paper for each person and three larger sheets of the same colors numbered from one to three.
6. If you are using Option 2, put up on newsprint how the process will work (see page 48).

Sharing Our Visions

(15+ minutes)

The important goal for these first few minutes is to get all of the ideas that people have come up with on the newsprint so that everyone can see them as quickly as possible. *Choose one of the following ways of doing that:*

Option 1

Post the sheets around the room and enlist fast writing scribes to come a few minutes early and stand beside the sheets, recording people's visions as they come in.

Option 2

Divide into four groups and give each group one of the labeled sheets of newsprint and a couple of felt-tipped markers of different colors. (You should not be in a group this time.) Ask them to write down their visions for that concern as quickly as possible, alternating colors so it will be easier to read. Explain that when they are done, you will switch sheets between groups. When you switch sheets, post instructions for this part of the process. They are then to read over the visions already listed, put an asterisk (*) beside any they also thought of, and add any new ones they have. Underscore the fact that time is short. They are not evaluating or expanding on the ideas, only recording them. Allow at least four minutes for each "round"; more if you possibly can.

Prioritizing Visions

(5+ minutes)

Put up lists of visions side by side and read them aloud, getting clarification if necessary. Emphasize again that the task is understanding, not evaluating, the visions.

Hand everyone their squares of construction paper and ask them to write their names on them. Post the larger numbered pieces.

We've dreamed up a wonderful list of possibilities here. Now let's decide on the three ideas we feel we as a church ought to act on right away. You can see from the sheets on the wall that the colors stand for our first, second, and third choices. *Without saying a word* let's place our squares next to what we think ought to be our priorities. (Hand out strips of masking tape for mounting the squares.)

Look at the results together with the group and identify the top three choices. If they are not obvious, give three points to each first choice vote, two points to each second, and one to each third.

Envisioning Our Future

(15+ minutes)

Form three groups as much as possible according to which of the three visions each person is most interested in.

Now that we've identified our top priorities, let's do some imagining about how they might become actualities. Picture us one year from now. We are meeting with a good friend who knows and is interested in our congregation. She asks, "Did anything ever come of that study you did of the bishops"

Foundation Document on vital congregations?" And you enthusiastically tell the story of how this vision we came up with through this crazy process became in twelve short months a reality in our life as a church. Your task in the next fifteen minutes is to come up with that story and be ready to share it with the rest of us. Here are some ideas that may help you tell it (post these on newsprint):

1. Who we went to first with our idea—pastor, chairperson, board, council, and so forth—and their reaction.
2. How they, with our help, took steps to implement the vision.
3. How people responded along the way, pro and con.
4. The results as of today [a year from now].

Appoint one person in each group who has some gift for ad-libbing to be the storyteller for the group. Urge folk to be playful, to have some fun dreaming these stories up.

Telling Our Stories

(10+ minutes)

Invite each storyteller to share the tale his or her group has come up with. Lead a round of applause for each one.

Preparing for Next Time

(2 minutes)

Living Out

Invite the group to think further about next steps in implementing these visions and to bring back their ideas next time. If there is some consulting to be done with officers, committees, pastor, or staff members, see if someone will volunteer to do that.

Preparing

Ask them to read pages 133-48.

Congregating

Assign partners for the week. Suggest that they might want to talk about how they see themselves in relation to the stories about the coming year.

Seeing Each Other From God's Point of View

As you think about each person, think about a way or ways each has made God's love more real for you. You might want to tell them by phone, after worship, or by a note. This is a good way to prepare for Communion.

Nourished and Sent

Preview

Final celebrations are fine. But how do you help the inspiration last? This session attempts to address this crucial question in three ways:

- first, by pressing people to be specific about what faithfulness will mean for them individually in the coming year;
- second, by inviting them to hold themselves and one another accountable for that vision;
- third, by prompting them to consider how they will deal with failing or falling short.

Maturity in Christ is a lofty goal and some missing of the mark is inevitable. The only question is whether we deal with failing or falling short in a grace-full and growth-full way!

Two basic options for closing have been provided. Your choice will depend on availability of time and of a clergyperson to celebrate Communion. If both are available, use both options together.

Overview

Talking About Our Faithfulness	15 minutes
Talking About Our Failures	5 minutes
Letter Writing	10+ minutes
Sharing and/or Communing	15+ minutes

Have on Hand

1. A stamped envelope and a sheet of stationery for each person. If your church has a letterhead, you may want to use it.
2. Some extra pens or pencils.
3. The three questions under “Talking About Our Faithfulness” (see below) on newsprint ready to post.
4. The guide for writing the letter (see “Letter Writing” section, pages 51-52) on newsprint ready to post.
5. Elements for Communion (see “Communing” section on page 52).

Talking About Our Faithfulness (15 minutes)

It will save time if you form people into conversation groups of four as they come in. It is crucial for you as leader to be in a group in this session.

In our last session we envisioned what being a vital congregation in the coming year will mean for [your church's name] as a church. Today we are going to look at what being a faithful disciple in the coming year is going to mean for each of us personally. To get us started in thinking about that, I'm going to pose three questions, allowing a moment after each one for us to think to ourselves about it. Then each time we'll have a chance to share our response with a different person in our foursome.

Question number one: What are the two or three things that in the past have nourished you as a Christian the most, and absolutely have to be included in your spiritual diet? (Allow a moment for people to think.) Turn to one member of your group and share your answer.

Question number two: The bishops call us to recognize that we gather as a church in order to be healed, strengthened, equipped, and sent again into the world to make God's love believable in and through our whole lives. As you think about the coming year in your life, what are the most important places to which God is sending you? Most of them probably will be the same places where we've been struggling to be faithful all along. But, prompted by all that we have been thinking about together, we may have caught a glimpse of a new direction in which God wants us to head, a new need to which God wants us to reach out. (Allow a moment.) Share what came to you with yet another person in your cluster.

Question number three: If you are to be truly faithful to God's call, how are you going to need to grow as a Christian? What are you going to need to work at learning, doing, being? (Allow a moment.) Talk about it with the third person in your group.

Talking About Our Failures

(5 minutes)

No matter how great our vision of discipleship or how deep our dedication to it may be, one thing is certain: we are bound to fall short or just plain fail. That's what comes from following One who is perfect in love. The only question is whether or not our failures will be occasions for our learning more about God's amazing grace and about how we need to change. The only sin with which God has difficulty dealing is the sin of giving up!

Let's think about how we usually deal with ourselves when we haven't quite been the people we want to be. Do we try not to think about it? rationalize? Are we hard on ourselves? hard on others? Or do we try to face up to it honestly with God and other people, ask for forgiveness, and try again? Are there ways in which we could respond more constructively to our failures? (Allow a moment.) In our small group let's share our thoughts about the best way of dealing with those times when we disappoint ourselves and God as disciples.

Letter Writing

(10+ minutes)

As a way of helping each of us get clear and concrete about faithfulness in the coming year, we are going to devote the next ten minutes to writing a brief letter to a very special person—*YOU!* The letter each of you writes now will be mailed to you one year from now as a reminder of how you intend to be faithful and what you plan to do if you fall short. Here is a sheet of paper on which to write and a stamped envelope to address to yourself. (Hand these out.) We will make these letters our offering in our closing worship. I will see that they are kept safe and sound and mailed to you in exactly one year.

Here is a suggested format to get you started. (Post the following and go over it briefly, making the suggestions listed in brackets.)

Dear

Here's how I hope to be a faithful disciple in the coming year. First of all, I feel especially sent to serve in/to . . . [This could include work, family, and ministries in and through our church but consider some new destinations of human need to which God may want to send you.]

And I am going to make sure that I am nourished and supported and equipped for ministry through . . . [Be concrete about your plans for worship and prayer and fellowship and study or training.]

When I get discouraged or fail to live up to my expectations, I am going to turn to . . . [Name the person or persons to whom you would turn and what you would ask of them.]

In Christ,

Sharing and/or Communing

(15+ minutes)

Choose one of the following options.

Option 1: Sharing

Faithfulness is something we can help one another with. Let's get back with our small groups and share whatever we would like about or from our letters. (If your group is under fifteen in number and you have extra time, this sharing would be a very meaningful thing to do in the total group.) **And let's think about how we can support each person in his or her discipleship.**

You may wish to devise your own closing worship. One way is to ask the group to stand in a circle holding hands or with arms around each other with the letters on a table in the center. Following a verse or two of a familiar song or hymn, invite them to create a litany together by speaking a word or a phrase that expresses how they feel as the Spirit moves them. Mention that you then will close with a prayer.

Option 2: Communing (if you have extra time)

"Word and Table III" from our new hymnal, pages 15-16, is the most appropriate liturgy for this informal setting. We recommend using a small loaf of bread and a chalice. If it is possible, have people sit in a circle. Explain ahead of time that we will be serving each other and demonstrate how we will be doing this. The easiest way is to pass the loaf to your neighbor on your right who breaks off a piece, gives it to you with a word of blessing, then passes the loaf to the person on his or her right. Ask people to hold on to their bread. When the bread has been around the circle, hold the cup for the person on your left to dip the bread, saying a word of blessing to her or him as you do.

Living Out

One way in which the group might witness to the rest of the congregation is by their bringing their letters forward as a part of the offering next Sunday. Also, one or two of them might say a word or two in the service about the experience. If the group is not an ongoing one and will be disbanding, consider planning some periodic reunions during the coming year to check in with one another and to see how the visions in Session 8 are coming along!

A GUIDE FOR USING THE *FOUNDATION DOCUMENT* IN WORSHIP

The *Foundation Document* is organized as a pattern of worship. The bishops intend the book to be used in worship as well as in study. In fact, you may find the *Document* more meaningful and powerful when you read parts of it aloud.

The pattern of the *Foundation Document* follows the order of worship presented in *The United Methodist Hymnal* as Word and Table I. But you may adapt the worship elements for use according to the custom of your own congregation. You will find appropriate hymns and prayers for each element of worship in the outer column of many pages in the book.

You may want to use the *Foundation Document* on many different occasions including congregational worship, prayer groups, or devotional settings. Above all, the book celebrates and praises God for the promise and possibilities of life together in Christian congregations. The book expresses many different voices of the church, especially in the stories and images from congregations. Worship in the style of the book therefore will celebrate the life and mission of congregations using multiple voices of the people of God.

Call to Worship

The section on "The Gathering of the People of God" calls the church both to study and to worship. The phrases "bells are ringing" and "the time has come," or the question "What time is it in the world?" (or church or community) make a dramatic call to worship. You may take responses for the congregation from pages 16-19 or from the bold sentences on pages 20-21. A similar responsory call can be developed from "the call of Jesus Christ" on page 22.

Litany of Thanksgiving

A call to praise may be created from the paragraphs that begin "We testify to God," pages 24-25. The naming of congregations and their ministries is prepared in litany form on pages 28-32. The leader may say, "Let us give thanks for . . ." and a different person in a different part of the room may respond each time with a sentence about one of the congregations. Some may be omitted. You may wish to add congregations of your community, a congregation with which you have a mission relationship, or your own congregation. A processional of the coats of arms designed in Session 1 of this *Leader's Guide* would be appropriate here.

Confession

You may create a call to confession from pages 34-36, especially the paragraph on page 36 beginning, "Therefore let us confess. . . ." The leader

may then read the headings in bold type, and the congregation may respond with the words in italic type. Some material under each heading may be condensed for the leader to read as well. A study group also may have written wordings especially appropriate to the situation of your congregation (see Session 2). The confession may conclude with unison reading of some or all of the sentences on page 44 beginning with "Let us. . . ."

Pardon

The pardon is presented in the *Foundation Document* as an announcement of forgiveness. The leader may read the capitalized words on pages 46-47, with other voices or the whole congregation saying the rest of the paragraph. A further declaration of commitment may be read in unison from pages 48-49, the sentences beginning, "Let us. . . ."

Hearing the Word

You will find many stories and images in this section of the book, both in the main text and in the outer column. These illustrations may be used in the sermon, or as a contemporary reading to accompany the Scripture of the day. The Ezekiel passage quoted on page 52 contains the central image of the entire *Foundation Document*. If you are designing a service especially around the celebration of congregational life, you may want to use this passage as the Scripture text.

Baptism

This section of the book contains descriptions of baptism, reaffirmation of baptism, confirmation, and the membership vows. You may wish to use them to interpret these actions in a particular service of worship.

Prayers

The prayers in this section of the book are the prayers of many different congregations. You are welcome to use them in worship. You may wish to add a prayer for your own congregation. You will find a call to prayer on page 99.

Call to Discipleship and Commitment

The signs of vitality in congregational life and of faithfulness in discipleship are described in the section called "Offering Our Response to the Lord." The leader may read the phrases in bold type. The congregation may respond either with sentences from the text, or with descriptions of how your congregation displays these signs of vitality and faithfulness. Here again, a study group may have written some material suitable for use in your congregation (see Sessions 7 and 8). You also may want to create a litany using the challenging questions in italic type on pages 122-23.

Holy Communion

The preacher of the day may find this section of the book useful in interpreting the sacrament of Holy Communion. You may use the paragraph in italic type on page 139 as a unison reading before the people receive the elements. The last paragraph on pages 139-40 is suitable for unison reading after Communion. The letters of intention and commitment written in study Session 9 may be dedicated as part of Communion.

Benediction and Sending Forth

The section of the *Foundation Document* called "The People of God Are Blessed and Sent" contains three possible litanies for going out from worship as the people of God in mission. One is on page 144. You may want to add your congregation's difficulties to this list, ending with a unison shout, "We do not lose heart." A second litany begins on page 145. The leader may say, "Our footsteps carry us . . ." and a different person in a different part of the room may respond with a sentence from pages 145-47. You may want to add other sentences, or let the people spontaneously call out their own intentions. The third litany begins on page 147 with the repeating words, "We are sent. . . ." Here different groups in the congregations may respond (men, women, choir, congregation, children, adults, and so on). You will find the benediction in the last few paragraphs on page 148.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The resources listed below may be ordered from Cokesbury by calling 1-800-672-1789 or from your local Cokesbury Bookstore.

Theological Roots

Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church, by Laurence H. Stookey (Abingdon Press, 1982). Presents a theology of baptism.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Faith and Order Paper Number 111) (World Council of Churches, 1982). This thirty-three-page statement is probably the most widely discussed ecumenical document on the contemporary scene.

The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting, edited by Gerald F. Moede (Consultation on Church Union, 1985). The latest in a series of publications that have emerged from discussions among nine church bodies since 1962. This sixty-three-page booklet provides a helpful biblical and theological discussion of the meaning of the church and the meaning of worship.

Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task: Leader's Guide, by Kenneth L. Carder (Graded Press, 1989). A thirteen-session study of the theological heritage and identity of United Methodists. Part II of *The 1988 Book of Discipline* has been reprinted as a companion Student Book.

God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy, by M. Douglas Meeks (Fortress, 1989). Meeks, a systematic theologian and Dean at Wesley Theological Seminary, offers a provocative exploration of economics and of the Trinity. He proposes recovering biblical and theological use of the *oikonomia tou theou*, the divine economy in the *oikos*, or household.

Grace Upon Grace: The Mission Statement of The United Methodist Church, by Patricia Jelinek and Thomas Langford (Graded Press, 1990). Contains the text of the 1988 General Conference mission statement, a commentary on that statement, five session plans for group study, and liturgical resources.

Introduction to Christian Worship, revised edition, by James F. White (Abingdon Press, 1990). A basic seminary textbook on worship.

The Liturgy of Liberation: The Confession and Forgiveness of Sins, by Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. (Abingdon Press, 1988). Argues that worship should be seen, not as an escape from the demands of the real world, but as the model and epitome of the way we engage the world in our daily life.

Mutual Ministry: New Vitality for the Local Church, by James C. Fenhagen (Harper & Row, 1986). Examines what basic concepts of Christian mission and community can mean on the local level. Explores the issue of congregational vitality in terms of four elements: the vision by which the church lives; the ministry through which the church acts; the structures by which the church is shaped; and the experience of faith in which the church is nourished. Worth reading and pondering.

People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshiping Community in the Modern World, by Robert E. Webber and Rodney Clapp (Harper & Row, 1988). Contends that the church's old battle lines of the 60's and 70's between the "old left" and the "new right" are hopelessly outdated. Argues that the essence of the church is centered in its worship life.

A Primer for Church Worship, by Hoyt L. Hickman (Abingdon Press, 1984). A fine brief introduction to worship for lay persons and clergy.

Remember Who You Are, by William H. Willimon (The Upper Room, 1981). A basic study book for lay persons on baptism.

Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony, by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon (Abingdon Press, 1989). This best-seller presents a provocative vision of the church as a colony, a distinctive people, shaped by values sharply different than those of the dominant culture.

Faithful Congregations: Shaped By the Bible, by William H. Willimon (Abingdon Press, April 1991). Taking his cue from a theme introduced in *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples*, one of United Methodism's prominent preachers and writers offers a fresh vision of how the Bible could and should be a shaping influence in local congregations. Designed primarily for lay study groups, clergy also will find this ninety-six-page volume insightful and useful.

Signs and Wonders: The Mighty Work of God in the

Church, by Richard B. Wilke (Abingdon Press, 1989). In this sequel to the best-seller *And Are We Yet Alive?* Bishop Wilke points to God's action in churches around the world and invites us to join the dramatic revival of the church.

Sunday Dinner, by William H. Willimon (The Upper Room, 1981). A basic study book for lay persons on Holy Communion.

Why It Matters: A Popular Introduction to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Text (World Council of Churches, 1985). Seventy-two pages.

Congregational Studies

Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church, edited by Carl S. Dudley (Harper & Row, 1983). Seventeen scholars and consultants demonstrate the benefits of looking at a congregation from several disciplines (psychology, sociology, ethnography, literary symbolism, theological ethics, philosophical theology, policy planning, and organizational development).

Congregation: Stories and Structures, by James F. Hopewell; edited by Barbara G. Wheeler (Fortress Press, 1987). A provocative landmark study that argues that the focus of theological education should be the life and faith of congregations rather than the formation of ministerial professionals. Difficult reading, but full of insights about the richness of congregational identity.

Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, edited by C. Ellis Nelson (John Knox Press, 1988). A collection of eleven essays that examine various aspects of congregational life. Aimed at clergy and lay leaders.

Handbook for Congregational Studies, edited by Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (Abingdon Press, 1986). Both a framework for understanding the nature of the congregation and a compendium of techniques for congregational study, this book looks at congregational identity, context, processes, program, and the use of social-scientific methods.

Church Growth and Revitalization

Bonds of Belonging: Pathways to Discipleship for Church Members, by Donald LaSuer and Ray Sells (Discipleship Resources, 1986). Maps the path to belonging walked by members who become fully

involved in the congregation's life and mission. A series of seven "bonds" is described—from the first response to the church's reputation to active service. The book includes how-to's for each bond, evaluation tools, and a four-session study guide.

Church Growth Handbook, by William M. Easum (Abingdon, 1990). Twenty growth principles are clearly explained and illustrated for use in any local church. The book includes complete diagnostic tools with specific guides for follow-through and emphasizes theological and administrative integrity. Small and large geographically and denominationally diverse examples help mainline Protestant clergy merge personal evangelism with social action involvement.

Church Growth: Strategies That Work, by Donald McGavran and George G. Hunter (Abingdon Press, 1980). Identifies strategies for different kinds of churches to increase attendance and build spirituality.

Congregational Transformation: A Manual on Congregational Redevelopment for Laypersons and Ministers, edited by James A. Craig (National Program Division, United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, 1988). Loose-leaf with three-ring binder. Includes sections on spiritual formation, mission design, leadership styles, program development, training and skill development, and connectional support.

Doing the Gospel: Local Congregations in Ministry, by Roy C. Nichols (Abingdon Press, 1990). Bishop Nichols was authorized by the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church to conduct a study of vital United Methodist churches. This book, which presents his findings, profiles one hundred forty-two dynamic United Methodist congregations that were selected by their bishops as outstanding examples of vitality. Offers proven strategies for developing thriving congregations.

Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys, by Kennon L. Callahan (Harper & Row, 1990). Shows how to apply effectiveness principles to the day-to-day leadership of local churches.

44 Questions for Church Planters, by Lyle E. Schaller (Abingdon Press, January, 1991). America's foremost church consultant advises pioneer pastors and denominational leaders about critical issues and pitfalls in the development of new congregations.

44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance, by Lyle E. Schaller (Abingdon Press, 1988). Forty-four tested

strategies from America's foremost authority on the dynamics of church life.

Get Ready, Set—Grow, by Gary Exman (C.S.S. Publishing, 1987). Practical helps for the small membership church beginning a new ministry of growth and response to the local community.

Organizing New Congregations, edited by W. James Cowell (Discipleship Resources, 1986). This is a how-to handbook for starting new churches: surveying needs, selecting a site, preparing a mission design, gathering a nucleus of members, funding. Also includes the qualifications and roles of the first pastor, biblical-theological foundations, three proven models, and resources.

Parable Churches, by Ralph and Nell Mohny (Discipleship Resources, 1989). Stories of United Methodism's ten fastest growing churches. Offers practical insights from vital and growing churches.

Rethinking Congregational Development, edited by George E. Morris (Discipleship Resources, 1984). Nine church leaders speak out on the revitalization of existing congregations and the development of new ones. A resource to equip new and long-established churches to become effective centers of Christian mission—reaching out and receiving persons, helping them relate to God, developing them as disciples, and sending them forth in mission and ministry.

Seeds on Good Soil, by Bette Wilson Story (Abingdon, 1989). Profiles of the first three winners of the "Circuit Rider Award" honoring United Methodists who have made outstanding recent contributions to membership and attendance growth in local churches and/or Sunday schools.

Sponsoring New Congregations, by W. James Cowell (Discipleship Resources, 1985). How one or more congregations may help start a new church. Includes case study and principles.

To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit, by George G. Hunter, III (Abingdon Press, 1987). Offers six proven strategies to bring people into the church. Combines church growth literature with Wesleyan theology.

Twelve Keys to an Effective Church, by Kennon L. Callahan (Harper & Row, 1983). Leader's Guide and Planning Workbook. One of America's foremost church consultants identifies essential characteristics of growing churches.

The Vital Congregation, by Herb Miller (Abingdon, 1990). One of America's top church consultants provides a clear description of the ten characteristics

found in vital congregations of every size and type, and offers readers a vision of how they can apply specific ideas to develop these characteristics in their own congregation. A mixture of biblical concepts, humor, illustrative stories, leadership insights, and reflection/discussion questions help lay persons address topics such as leadership, worship, fellowship, evangelism, prayer, spiritual growth, stewardship, and more.

Vitality Means Church Growth, by Douglas W. Johnson (Abingdon Press, 1989). The author suggests three characteristics of vital congregations: helping members in their quest for spiritual fulfillment; helping members live as active Christian disciples and stewards; and providing a caring, nurturing environment. The book is built on recent studies of hundreds of congregations. It includes real-life stories as testimonies, guides, and encouragement.

What Can We Do About Church Dropouts? by C. Kirk Hadaway (Abingdon, 1990). Designed to help pastors and church leaders identify, understand, and reach out to church dropouts and prevent members from becoming dropouts.

Sunday School Growth

Growing Through an Effective Church School, by Frank Proctor (CBP Press, 1990). This call to responsible evangelism argues that our aim is not success or survival but obedience to Jesus' command to make and to teach disciples.

Start-Up Manual for New Sunday Schools, by Kirk McNeil (Discipleship Resources, 1985). Covers the why, what, where, who, and how of starting new Sunday schools and shares intriguing success stories. A workbook section leads users through a tested five-step process for organizing new Sunday schools.

Sunday School Growth and Renewal: How to Reach, Teach, Care, Share, by Millie S. Goodson (Discipleship Resources, 1984). A guide to revitalizing the Sunday school, beginning new Sunday schools and classes, and expanding weekly opportunities. Addresses pastors, Christian educators, members of the education work area, church school committees, and teachers. Includes plans, success stories, helpful suggestions, and questions for reflection and action.

Evangelism

Evangelism Ministries Planning Handbook, by Suzanne G. Braden (Discipleship Resources, 1987).

The basic resource book for local congregations who are planning their approach to evangelism for the future. Local churches are using it widely as a study reflection guide.

Evangelism Ministries Planning Handbook (Korean). Available from Discipleship Resources (1990).

Faith Sharing: Dynamic Christian Witnessing by Invitation, by H. Eddie Fox and George Morris (Discipleship Resources, 1986). This book provides the basic content for a six-session study-action group: learning the content of faith to be shared, the power of faith sharing, relational method of faith sharing and skills practice in experiential learning of the faith sharing approach. A video entitled *Faith Sharing* is available.

Getting the Story Straight, by H. Eddie Fox and Shirley F. Clement (Discipleship Resources, 1980). A four-week study used in the Cultivation Phase of the Key Event Celebration.

Grace Esteem, by Eddie Fox (Discipleship Resources, 1988). A resource for the New Life Mission provides inspiring study of the theme of grace, Christian life, and practice. Biblical teachings and Wesleyan theology are combined to provide energizing foundations for a local church's approach to evangelism.

Growth Plus: The Vision, by Joe A. Harding (Discipleship Resources, 1987). The basic resource for study reflection and action on the Growth Plus approach to evangelism. This approach, which involves the "affirm and build model," encourages dreams, visions, and wide participation from the laity. New member classes and adult classes across the church are using it widely. *Growth Plus: The Vision* video is available also.

Growth Plus Worship Attendance Crusade, by Joe A. Harding (Discipleship Resources, 1988). An outline of a proven plan to help local congregations increase worship attendance during a period of three to five months. Designed to be used from January to Easter; Easter to Pentecost. Provides practical steps and guidelines for involving members of the small, medium, or large membership church in a vital growth experience. Other resource materials for the attendance crusade are listed in the booklet.

Inherit the Kingdom, by H. Eddie Fox (Discipleship Resources, 1981). A companion resource to the New World Mission. This study is designed to help persons in the church catch a glimpse of God's invitation to each of us to inherit the Kingdom and to respond to this invitation.

Key Event Handbook (Discipleship Resources, 1976). The basic resource for local churches planning for Key Event Celebrations. The Key Event is a contemporary model of evangelism designed for local churches. It focuses on celebrating the historical faith and then sharing that faith by both doing and telling the good news. The Celebration Phase focuses on the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus and on Pentecost.

The Lay Witness Mission Preparation Manual, by Walter Albritton (Discipleship Resources, 1972). This manual contains the necessary planning suggestions to help a local church effectively prepare for a Lay Witness Mission. A Lay Witness Mission is a weekend experience in which a group of ordinary persons who have encountered the power of Christ in their life share their faith stories with a local church. The Lay Witness Mission encourages the formation of small groups in a local church. It includes a model for Saturday morning coffees in homes where persons are encouraged to invite unchurched friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

Living a New Life, by H. Eddie Fox (Discipleship Resources, 1978). A study focusing on the theme of "becoming and being a disciple." This booklet is designed to be used specifically in the Preparation Phase for four to six weeks to prepare the congregation to be receptive to a new life in the Spirit and to be disciples in the present day.

Living a New Life (Korean) (Discipleship Resources, 1983).

New Life Mission Handbook (Discipleship Resources, 1974). A detailed outline to help a committee in a local church plan for a New Life Mission. The New Life Mission will help your congregation discover its strengths and weaknesses in evangelism; start new small groups and home gatherings for fellowship and study; invite new visitors to the worship services; accept new professions of faith and make disciples of all.

New Life Mission Handbook (Korean) (Discipleship Resources, 1983).

New World Mission Handbook (Discipleship Resources, 1974). Explains the New World Mission evangelism strategy and outlines the various responsibilities involved in the preparation and follow-through for the mission. The New World Mission brings missionaries from other countries to the USA to share the gospel and to share their witness in our midst. The next phase will be in 1992.

Plan Comprensivo de Evangelismo, by Harold K.

Bales (Discipleship Resources, 1983). Este útil y práctico manual presenta el evangelismo, no como una actividad ocasional limitado a un evento o a un evangelista, sino como una actividad constante de todos los miembros y grupos de la iglesia.

Sharing Faith Stories, by Mary Jane Lyon (Discipleship Resources, 1988). A companion resource for the Lay Witness Mission. Shares faith stories of ordinary persons.

Singles Care One for Another, by Karen Greenwaldt (Discipleship Resources, 1989). Greenwaldt discusses the needs of single adults and will help readers plan ministries to attract and to keep in church this vital segment of our society.

Worship and Evangelism, by Andy and Sally Langford (Discipleship Resources, 1989). This book lifts up the importance of worship in the process of reaching people with the gospel for Jesus Christ. It gives practical ideas and suggestions to make worship more inspiring and meaningful.

Personal Growth in Faith

A Call to Holy Living: Walking with God in Joy, Praise, and Gratitude, by Bruce Larson (Augsburg, 1988). A popular writer comments on how to live a balanced Christian life in today's world.

Accountable Discipleship: Handbook for Covenant Discipleship Groups in the Congregation, by David Lowes Watson (Discipleship Resources, 1985; revised edition). This basic resource provides the reader with the essential historical and theological foundations of this early Methodist tradition, a step-by-step process by which to form CD groups, and its implications for ministry today.

Branch Groups: Covenant Discipleship for Youth, by Lisa Grant (Discipleship Resources, 1989). *Branch Groups* are small covenant groups for youth that help participants practice spiritual disciplines. Like the adult Covenant Discipleship groups, *Branch Groups* are today's version of the early Methodist class meetings that John Wesley used to help persons watch over one another in love. This complete handbook will guide youth and their leadership through the purposes and formation of *Branch Groups*.

Disciple: Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study. A pastor led, in-depth, thirty-four-session Bible study. Based on a model of Jesus and the Twelve, groups consist of twelve persons invited by the pastor. The administrative board or administrative

council of a local church must approve the enrollment of the congregation in this program. The study requires a commitment of money, training, time, and congregational support. For enrollment information and a schedule of training events, call 1-800-672-1789 or write to *Disciple*, Cokesbury, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202.

Participants will have an overview of the entire Bible that will launch them into lifelong study of God's word. As they participate in the study, they will become prepared to lead others in Christian witness and work.

The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance, by David Lowes Watson (Discipleship Resources, 1985). This basic resource introduces the modern reader to the early Methodist class meeting. Also offers guidelines for using the class meeting in local congregations.

Experiment in Practical Christianity, by Adrienne and John Carr (Discipleship Resources, 1985; revised edition). Participant's Book and Leader's Guide. A proven program for guiding small groups, over a period of twelve weeks, in deepening Christian faith. This program connects insights gained from a fresh look at the Gospel of Mark with daily relationships and decisions, building Christian friendships, evaluating use of time and energy, and discovering one's mission in life.

Faithful Congregations: Holiness of Heart and Life, by Stephen Seamands (Abingdon Press, April, 1991). Provides a deeper look at one of the themes addressed by the Council of Bishop's *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples*. This ninety-six-page book makes accessible to individual lay readers and to study groups the rich Wesleyan heritage of holiness of heart and life. It will help persons glimpse how a rediscovered passion for holiness could enrich the life of persons and congregations here and now.

Pathways to Faith: The Stories of 210 Faithful People, by Gordon E. Jackson with Phyllisee Foust Jackson (Abingdon, 1989). Informative and sometimes inspiring accounts of how people come into the Christian faith and experience life in the church.

The Pilgrimage Project: Renewing Our Sense of God's Presence and Purpose, by Adrienne and John Carr (The Upper Room, 1987). A proven study on spiritual growth for youth and adults. Participant's Notebook and Leader's Guide.

Pray and Grow, by Terry Teykl (Discipleship Resources, 1988). A guide to helping local congregations become centers of dynamic power through prayer. Shares methods from dozens of churches and

provides help for selecting the proper models of prayer to support the evangelism ministries of the church.

Spiritual Growth in the Congregation, by Robert H. Boyte and Kelly Boyte Peters (CBP Press, 1988). A practical guide to spirituality for leaders of mainline Protestant congregations.

Talking With God, by Mack B. Stokes (Abingdon, 1989). Stokes, a retired bishop and former seminary professor, examines what the Bible says about prayer, offers practical suggestions for developing a meaningful prayer life, and tackles many of the problems or questions people have concerning prayer.

We Are an Easter People, by Adrienne and John Carr (The Upper Room, 1989). Leader's Guide and Participant's Notebook. A resource for a five-week program for spiritual growth in small groups. Uses Bible study, group interaction, personal reflection, and partnership sharing to help lay persons experience God's power in their life.

Ministry in Everyday Life

The Empowering Church: How One Congregation Supports Lay People's Ministries in the World, by Davida Foy Crabtree (Alban Institute, 1989). The author is senior minister of a church of six hundred plus members in Colchester, Connecticut.

Every Member in Ministry, by John Ed Mathison (Discipleship Resources, 1988). Outlines the approach of Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church to involve large numbers of laity in volunteer ministries. This resource is of invaluable assistance in mobilizing laity for ministry within and beyond the local church.

Laity Stirring the Church: Prophetic Questions, by Delores R. Leckey (Fortress, 1987). Explores six issues or questions that are challenging the church across all denominational lines: the quest for experiential knowledge of God (as contrasted to transmitted knowledge about God); pressures and

possibilities in contemporary marriages and families; changing role of women; the desire for work that is religiously satisfying; new experiences of lay ministry; and the appearance of basic Christian communities.

Let My People Go: Empowering Laity for Ministry, by Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck (Abingdon, 1982). Offers suggestions for training lay persons in leadership styles, effective decision making, planning for action, congregational assessment, and spiritual beliefs.

Faithful Congregations: Making Moral Decisions, by J. Philip Wogaman (Abingdon Press, April, 1991). A distinguished Christian ethicist and United Methodist churchman presents a brief, focused, and lively discussion that takes seriously the Council of Bishops' call for churches to be communities of moral discourse and action. Wogaman helps lay persons explore why the church should care about moral issues; resources (including the Bible) that can enhance moral decision making; traps to be avoided; specific ideas that have worked in actual congregations; and the connections between moral discernment and worship, Christian education, and other tasks in the local church. Suitable for individual reading and group study.

Ministry of the Laity, by James Anderson and Ezra Earl Jones (Harper & Row, 1986). Reclaims "ministry of the laity" as a concept referring to actions of Christians *outside* the church, their ministry in everyday life, rather than involvement in activities *within* the church. The actions of individuals, in turn, emerge from their character. The seedbed of our character formation is in family, neighborhood, school, and local associations.

Society of St. Stephen Handbook (Discipleship Resources, 1984). Christian discipleship involves service to the poor, the troubled, and the lonely. This book provides step-by-step instructions for the development of a congregationally based small group for ministry with persons in need. It includes stories of societies at work in United Methodist churches, resources for Bible study, and instructions for taking action.

THE JOURNEY OF A CONNECTIONAL PEOPLE

The Council of Bishops' message in *Vital Congregations—Faithful Disciples* resonates with the message in Paragraph 112 of the 1988 *Book of Discipline*, entitled "The Journey of a Connectional People." The very fact that our bishops have issued a *Pastoral Letter* and *Foundation Document* testifies to our connectedness as United Methodists. Even more telling is the nature of the bishops' message; they have issued a call for renewed and shared *vision*. Shared vision is crucial to the connectional principle that unites us. The "network of interdependent relationships among persons and groups" (which is the essence of our connectional principle) that stretches across The United Methodist Church is enlivened and empowered by a shared vision of who we are and what God is calling us to do. Shared vision inspires coordinated and sustained action on behalf of Christ.

The movement of the *Foundation Document* follows the movement of worship. Our word *liturgy* refers to the worship of God by the gathered Christian community. The ancient roots of the term *liturgy* point to another note of resonance between the bishops' statement and paragraph 112 of the *Discipline*. *Liturgy* comes from the Greek word for "the work of the people." How appropriate that we should be reminded of *how* we do our work—through a connectional style of relationships!

A shared *memory* of our United Methodist heritage is a key element in both the *Foundation Document* and the disciplinary statement on our bond as a connectional people. Particularly in the section of the *Foundation Document* entitled "Living by the Stream of Wesleyan Heritage," the bishops have underscored the importance of a common memory as crucial to our identity and our cohesiveness. Just as the memories shared by family members create a bond that lies deeper than mere legal relationships, so our shared memories as United Methodists create a bond that lies deeper than organizational structure alone.

Paragraph 112 calls attention to the theological and biblical roots of our connectional identity. Likewise, the bishops' *Foundation Document* is permeated with biblical images and theological concepts that shape and inform the bishops' message to the church. For instance, both the *Discipline* and the *Foundation Document*, in describing the unity of Christians, appeal to the images of *body of Christ* and *household of God* (see *Foundation Document*, pages 49-50). A careful reading of the *Foundation Document* will reveal numerous biblical images and theological concepts that undergird our connectedness as United Methodists.

Discipline is a key element supporting our connectional principle. Our bishops have called attention to discipline as both privilege and responsibility. See their discussion of "Holy Living" (pages 60-62), "Signs of Vitality in Congregational Life" (pages 100-111), and "Signs of Faithfulness in Discipleship" (pages 111-20).

Our connectional principle guides "the way in which we carry out God's mission as a people." Our connectional bond makes possible the sharing of resources from one congregation to another. Our connectional polity facilitates coordinated mobilization and deployment for mission. Some tasks of ministry and mission require the dedication of more than one congregation. The connectional principle allows congregations to draw vitality from and contribute vitality to other congregations as we seek to live as faithful disciples.

The text of paragraph 112 from the 1988 *Book of Discipline* follows:

¶112. 1. *Introduction.*—Ever since John Wesley began to refer to the scattered Methodist classes, bands and societies throughout eighteenth-century England as “the connexion,” Methodists everywhere have embraced the idea that as a people of faith we journey together in connection and in covenant with one another. Expressing the high degree of cohesiveness and centralized organization among Methodists, the connectional principle became the distinguishing mark which set them apart from the normal patterns of Anglican ecclesiastical organization as well as the more loosely organized Protestant bodies of the day.

2. *Roots.*—This acceptance of strong covenantal bonds among the Methodists was no accident. There were deep theological roots, including the concept and experience of covenant and the resulting emphasis on faith journeying in covenant with God and one another. The connectional idea is a style of relationship rather than simply an organizational or structural framework. As Bishop Paul Washburn once said, it is made up of “living, interdependent and interacting relationships . . . born in covenant-making events.”

There were deep biblical roots as well. Images of the Church, especially in the New Testament—the vine and the branches, the wedding feast, the household or commonwealth of God, the new humanity with cosmic and kingdom dimensions, the fellowship of the saints, the Body of Christ, and a host of others—supplemented the covenant concept. The very structure of the Apostolic Church was connectional and covenantal. Paul realized very early the importance of superintending scattered congregations.

It is important to note that we are not a connectional people because of biblical or theological or even historical mandates. The evolution of our polity has, however, been a natural response to these elements in our background and they continue to inform and direct our efforts.

3. *The Principle Itself.*—Let us simply state the **connectional principle** and its essential ingredients:

The United Methodist connectional principle, born out of our historical tradition, many biblical roots, and accepted theological ideas, is the basic form of our polity, the way in which we carry out God’s mission as a people.

It is in essence a network of interdependent relationships among persons and groups throughout the life of the whole denomination.

It declares that our identity is in our wholeness together in Christ that each part is vital to the whole, that our mission is more effectively carried out by a connectional life which incorporates Wesleyan zeal into the life of the people.

a) *Shared Vision.*—The principle provides a way to identify the gospel alive in today’s world as a shared vision that inspires our actions on behalf of Christ. The lonely witness for salvation in Christ has its place but only when sustained and inspired by others sharing that vision.

b) *Memory.*—The principle provides continued remembrance of the story of our heritage as United Methodist Christians in order that we might share more meaningfully in the experience and the mission of the universal Church. As we know and share the common story of our faith journey, our witness to the world is strengthened.

c) *Community.*—The principle provides for relationships of Holy Spirit-empowered community wherein support, supervision, healing, accountability, and growth can take place for persons and groups across the denomination. Our life together, with its mutual accountability and relationships, keeps us ever alert to being faithful to the gospel in all our efforts. Through it the whole system may be fueled with life-giving Spirit energy.

d) *Discipline*.—The principle provides a life of voluntary compliance to a discipline which includes rights and privileges as well as responsibilities and obligations. Our mutual acceptance of a disciplined life together enables more effective ministry to the world.

e) *Leadership*.—The principle provides a sharing of resources and resource persons for mission and ministry—for pastors and lay people in local settings or beyond local settings. This is done through superintending pastors, boards, and agencies that serve the denomination in ways it may determine.

f) *Mobilization*.—The principle provides coordinated missional mobilization and deployment in response to the gospel call. The intentional work of the entire body has the potential of greater influence on human life—in response to great social issues, in extending the gospel to new fields, in deploying the ordained in the most effective way. All parts of the Church are vessels of mission, bound together by a form, so an effective whole is developed.

g) *Linkage*.—The principle provides an interdependent network of gathering points which brings us together in various ways to carry out our shared mission. In these “conferring” experiences we all celebrate together and together lay out our strategy for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. In this way corporate, compassionate power is released.

4. *Affirmation and Stress*.—As United Methodist people we celebrate the fact that connectionalism has served us well in our mission and ministry, and we affirm its central place in our life together. At the same time we recognize there are stresses that must be addressed if the connectional principle is to continue to serve us well in the future. The stresses include issues surrounding clergy itineracy and the appointment process, decision-making, apportionments and designated giving, episcopal leadership, and mutual accountability. It is important for connectionalism to bend, to have tolerance in a changing world, to be able to live in the new days ahead of us with freshness and new commitment.

5. *The Challenge*.—Now we have the special opportunity to take this way of doing mission and ministry and to use it effectively in accomplishing our goals as a Church. We have a unique avenue for witnessing and reaching out with the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the end that the world will indeed be reformed. The connectional principle should be interpreted to all our people in new and fresh ways and lifted up with enthusiasm as an effective instrument in our efforts to bring the world as we know it closer in harmony with the will and purpose of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.¹

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